LINDA LANE EXPERIMENTS

JOSEPHINE LAWRENCE

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She sat quietly in the wagon enjoying the sunshine and silence and trying to picture Mary Rice.

(Linda Lane Experiments) *(Frontispiece)*

LINDA LANE EXPERIMENTS

BY

JOSEPHINE LAWRENCE

AUTHOR OF "LINDA LANE" SERIES,
"ELIZABETH ANN" SERIES, "TWO
LITTLE FELLOWS" SERIES, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	Repairs and Renovations ...	9
II	David Comes Back	19
III	Add One Brother	27
IV	Casting the Play	37
V	Tact Goes a Long Way	47
VI	The First Difference	57
VII	A New Thorn	69
VIII	Second Rehearsal	80
IX	Miss Patience Greene	90
X	Jimmie Makes a Suggestion .	100
XI	Over the Ridge	112
XII	Mary Rice	122
XIII	A Full Day	132
XIV	Missing—A Brother	142
XV	Sudden Excitement	152
XVI	The Burglar Apologizes ...	161
XVII	Trifles, But Not Perfection	170
XVIII	Breakers Ahead	180
XIX	Called into Consultation ..	192
XX	Joy Incarnate	202
XXI	Add a Baby Sister	212
XXII	More Differences	221
XXIII	Everybody Pleased	231

ILLUSTRATIONS

She sat quietly in the wagon enjoying the sunshine and silence and trying to picture Mary Rice [Page 124] *Frontispiece*

PAGE

"Certainly," Janice spoke sharply, "I think blue will be lovely" 63

For answer Patty hurled both her eggs straight at David 101

"I'm thinking," said Jimmie slowly, "whether you have a right to wreck the whole play" 187

LINDA LANE EXPERIMENTS

CHAPTER I

REPAIRS AND RENOVATIONS

A TREMENDOUS knocking sounded on the front door.

Miss Gilly turned pale and Grandma Poore put down the coffee pot murmuring, "Heavenly days!"

"It will be," said Linda Lane, her gray eyes dancing, "the 'carpinters,' the electricians and the paper hangers."

"Who says 'carpinters'?" inquired Miss Gilly curiously.

"The 'carpinter' himself," Linda assured her, purposely accenting the second syllable of the word.

"We must be late," said Grandma calmly, "for certainly they can not be early."

Linda had already dashed for the door and when she had it open, admitting half a dozen

workmen who tramped upstairs, mumbling "good morning" as they passed her, the glory of the April day seemed too lovely to be shut out.

"I'll leave the door open," Linda called over her shoulder.

If she had proposed taking the door off, Miss Gilly would probably have assented. Mrs. Hampton, her next-door neighbor, was fond of remarking that Miss Gilly was but an echo of Linda Lane. But then Mrs. Hampton liked, so other neighbors said, to run the universe and Linda rather gave her competition in that line. So perhaps Linda wasn't quite so self-assertive as she might have seemed.

This morning, the dark-haired, gray-eyed girl was in her element. It was Saturday and school, generally conceded to be something of an annoyance in good April weather, was positively a nuisance when one lived in a little brown house that was, apparently, being wrecked in the effort to install therein those highly desirable conveniences known as "modern improvements." Miss Gilly had lived in the little brown house for thirty-five years, without a furnace, or a bathroom, or electric lights. Now she was to have all three, and the rooms were to be painted and papered anew, the roof was to be "put in shape," whatever that might mean, and two small bedrooms were to be built out over the back porch.

Linda Lane was the moving factor in this wholesale renovation. That is, Miss Gilly relied on her to make selections from the bewildering confusion of catalogues, to choose the wall paper and inspect the "tints" the town decorator extended on a shingle, like so many cake icings. Miss Gilly said she liked things "nice," but she couldn't tell how anything would look until it was done and in place and then it was too late to change it. Linda possessed the gift of "visualization"—she could see the completed living room, furnish the two new bedrooms and decide just where the floor plugs should go, "on paper," if necessary.

So Saturday, naturally, was welcomed by such a busy young person and as she stood in the spring sunshine on the front porch carefully avoiding the dangerous spot where the "carpinter" had discovered at rotten floor board which would have to be replaced, Linda, in her orange-colored smock, looked amazingly competent.

"It is so delicious," she told herself, half unconsciously scanning the shabby yard for signs of progress on the part of the tulips which were rather slow this year, "it is so delicious to feel that Aunt Carol can have all this done and without a single bit of worry. That is why we don't mind living in odd corners while they turn the house topsy-turvy—it's all fun. I always

thought it must be wonderful to have some money and now I know it. I wonder if—will you listen to that!"

"That" was a crash from within and Linda rushed into the hall, to find Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore standing at the foot of the stairs.

"Glory be!" an anguished voice was wailing somewhere in the upper regions. "I've smashed the elder's daughter!"

"You've murdered her and a complete job you've made of it," said some one accusingly.

"She fell on me foot,"—the anguished wailing was interrupted while the "murderer" made his defense.

Linda began to giggle.

"Aunt Carol, it's the Rogers' group," she whispered. "We moved it out into the hall while they were wiring the front room."

Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore looked at each other and laughed.

"It always did take up too much space," said the former.

"I'll go up and sweep away the remains," Linda offered, taking the broom from the closet under the stairs.

In the upper hall she found the carpenter and two electricians standing over the plaster pieces that had been "The Elder's Daughter," a very

touching and sentimental group of three figures with which Linda had long been familiar.

"I was just merely brushing by it, Miss," said the carpenter sadly, "and crash, the whole thing came down on me foot. I suppose it's a very valuable bit of bricky-brac."

"It's pottery," one electrician said firmly.

"I don't think my aunt was ever particularly attached to it," said Linda cheerfully, "and it always did take up too much room. I'll sweep it up, Mr. McFayne, and you won't have to brush by it any more."

"I hardly ever break any bricky-brac," the carpenter assured her earnestly, as she began to sweep up the débris. "My wife's got our parlor so full a man can't hardly breathe without blowing over something, but I haven't knocked a thing over since the first year we were married."

Muttering his regrets still, he went on to his work and Linda finished sweeping up the fragments. She went down to the back porch to dump them in the trash can and was hailed by Mrs. Hampton.

"Have the workmen come?" asked Mrs. Hampton.

"Can I have some shavings Linda?" and Buddy Hampton appeared on his mother's left.

"Please, Linda, let me see them paper-hang?"

and on the other side of Mrs. Hampton, her daughter, Lucy, came into view.

Linda was used to this battery. More, she was genuinely fond of them. The children were devoted to her and if at times their affection was a little too clinging, why she sensibly accepted the bitter with the sweet.

"The workmen are here—working," said Linda demurely. "There aren't any shavings now, Buddy, because the 'carpinter' is putting in the window frames and not doing any planing. And, Lucy lamb, I'm afraid you'll have to watch them paint, instead of 'paper-hang,' because they do that first."

"I wish you wouldn't say 'carpinter'," Mrs. Hampton complained. "Both the children use it now. You ought to remember that where there are children, you are constantly setting an example, Linda."

"Yes'm," said Linda, "but why don't they copy my lovely, high-minded traits of mind and character?"

Mrs. Hampton was watching the adjustment of a scaffold with fascinated eyes.

"I don't know," she murmured absently to the wicked delight of Linda.

"I don't believe I've got a drop of arnica in the house," went on Mrs. Hampton. "And only last night I was reading where a rope broke and

killed two painters. It is always best to be prepared and I think I'll send Buddy up to the drug store right away. Unless Miss Gilly or Mrs. Poore have some. I'll just go into the kitchen and ask them."

Mrs. Hampton wouldn't say "your aunt" to Linda when she spoke of Miss Gilly, for the same reason that she refused to call Mrs. Poore "Grandma," though half the town of Morrisville gave her that pleasant title. Mrs. Hampton could not bring herself, as she frequently observed, to say "what wasn't so." And neither gentle little Miss Gilly nor wise and kind Mrs. Poore were blood kin to Linda.

"We might as well water the chickens," said Linda to the children, who were casting longing glances at several open cans of paint.

Linda had a dozen things she was eager to do, but past experience had taught her that it was never safe to leave the two small Hamptons to their own devices. Their mother went through life on the comfortable theory that some one would look after Buddy and Lucy when she was otherwise engaged and she was otherwise engaged most of the time, the uncharitable among the neighbors said.

The chicken yard was Linda's own domain and that spring she had had it painted and new runs made, as well as drinking fountains for the

biddies and the latest thing in tar roofs put on the house. She had every chicken named and it always enchanted Buddy and Lucy to hear her speak to the hens and roosters as though they were pets, as indeed they were.

"Talk to the chickens, Linda," Lucy would urge, if Linda attempted to hurry through her duties without this one-sided conversation.

But to-day Buddy and Lucy seemed to have more on their minds than the attractions of the chicken yard. They watched Linda fill the fountains for a few minutes in silence and then Buddy spoke.

"How does it feel to be adopted?" he asked bluntly.

Linda flushed, but her gray eyes met his dark ones squarely.

"Why—nice!" she smiled.

"But what did they do?" Buddy persisted. "Was Miss Jackson there?"

"Mother said Judge Mason was there," put in Lucy conversationally.

Linda put down her water pail.

"Now I can't tell you everything that happened, word for word," she declared impressively. "Lots of it I didn't understand myself. About all I know is that Aunt Carol and I had to be in court and Judge Mason, because he is Aunt Carol's lawyer. Mrs. Quincy was there

and the lawyer who represents the State Society. And there was a judge. And everyone talked a little and asked me a few questions and they signed papers and Judge Mason said I was the legally adopted child of Carol Gilly and no longer a ward of the State. So here I am and nothing is any different than it was before, except that I belong to Aunt Carol as much as you and Buddy belong to your mother."

"Oh!" said Lucy and appeared to be digesting this information.

"And Miss Gilly's Cousin Dorothea died and left her a lot of money and she is going to adopt dozens of children," amended Buddy.

Linda laughed and sighed a moment later.

"I suppose that is the story going the rounds," she said gently. "Listen, my dears, suppose you didn't have each other? Suppose Lucy were a little girl, living all alone, and Buddy were a little boy all by himself, with no father or mother or brothers or sisters? Suppose this were true, what would you want most?"

"An Indian suit," said Buddy placidly.

"A cowgirl hat," Lucy submitted.

Linda hugged them fervently.

"You blessed little lunatics!" she crowed. "Serves me right for trying to make you grow up before your time. What you really would want, would be a family, but not only are you

too young to get that point, but you have always had a family and multitudes of connections, so you can't conceive what it means to be without them. Just the same, Buddy and Lucy, some day I mean to have a flock of little brothers and sisters and you must come and play with them."

Buddy was slightly bored by the turn the conversation had taken. He squinted through the wire fence, perhaps in the hope of spotting an Indian.

"Here comes Independence," he said, as Linda's dog trotted down the street.

"Here comes David," Lucy's treble reported.

"WHAT!" Linda, whose back had been to the fence, whirled around like an animated top. "What did you say, Lucy?"

CHAPTER II

DAVID COMES BACK

"David," repeated Lucy. "You know—the little boy whose grandpa died."

But Linda had already unfastened the gate of the chicken yard and was racing across the lawn toward the small figure stolidly following the equally quiet dog.

"David—oh, David!" Linda's voice rose in a crescendo of delight. "David darling, did you come back to see us?"

Independence sat down and wagged his tail. Linda's face was vivid and glowing and the love in her expressive voice must have touched anyone who heard and understood. But the silent, inscrutable child who faced her, merely gazed at her gravely.

"Have you come back to see us, dear?" asked Linda, kneeling and putting her arms around him. "Where is the car? And where are Mr. and Mrs. Lawson?"

"I walked," David announced calmly. "I walked away. And I am not going back any

more, Linda. I am going to live with you."

"Heavenly days!" said Mrs. Hampton's voice behind Linda.

And then, feeling that she had not adequately expressed herself, she added, "Mercy on us!"

Linda choked back a distinct irritation. Mrs. Hampton must have seen David from the front window and there was no use questioning him further, while a third person was present.

"David has come to see us," said Linda, rising and taking his hand. "I'll have to go in now and get him some breakfast."

"I'll be over later," called Mrs. Hampton significantly. "Is that Buddy playing in the water in the chicken yard—and I've told him twenty times to keep out of that pail!"

To Linda's relief she sped for Buddy and it was possible to reach the house with David, before Buddy's wails announced his discipline.

"Aunt Carol—Grandma!" called Linda excitedly, as she and David, followed by Independence, entered the kitchen. "Come see who's here."

Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore both fell upon the small boy with every manifestation of delight and he submitted to their greeting with the same quiet indifference with which he had met Linda's caresses.

"He's hungry," said Linda.

"I got a blister on my heel," David offered, evidently more as an item of general interest, than a complaint.

Miss Gilly busied herself at the stove and Linda began to lay a place at the kitchen table. Grandma Poore lifted the child to her comfortable lap and unlaced his tan shoe. Everything he wore was of excellent quality and his shoes, though badly scuffed, were clearly the best money could buy.

"Why, David!" exclaimed Grandma in dismay, when she saw the little heel, the tender skin puffed and angry-looking and a large watery blister attesting to the truth of the lad's statement.

"Did you walk?" Linda demanded quickly, stopping with a plate in her hand. "David, you *couldn't* have walked all that distance."

David said nothing. He possessed the gift, unusual in one so young, of maintaining an inscrutable silence that was not sulky or defiant but baffling in the extreme.

Grandma Poore rose and deposited him in her chair.

"You stay there till I get some gauze and some ointment," she commanded.

She left the kitchen and Miss Gilly went down cellar to get a special pot of jam. Linda and David were alone.

"Linda!" he said softly.

She went over to him and sat down beside him on the chair.

"Yes, dear," she whispered.

"I want to stay with you," said David.

"With me?" Linda faltered. "But, David, you live with Mrs. Lawson now. You're her little boy."

"Can't we go away?" suggested David. "Maybe we could live in the house in the woods —where Grandpa did, you know."

Linda shook her head.

"You don't seem to think I would mind leaving home," she commented, with a slight smile. "I belong to Aunt Carol now, David—I'm her adopted daughter. Just as you'll be Mrs. Lawson's adopted little boy by and by."

"I don't want to be her little boy," David announced. "I don't want to stay in her house. I would rather live with you, Linda."

"Why?" asked Linda curiously.

And then David for the first, and practically the last, time put his arms around her and mumbled shyly in her ear, "Because I love you."

Linda gave him a breathless hug and then Grandma Poore came back and the heel was washed and dressed and David was brought to the table and ate a prodigious meal under the affectionate guardianship of three pairs of eyes.

"What are they doing upstairs?" he asked, as the sound of hammering came down the stairway.

"Now they're doing a number of things, but no small boys are needed," Linda said quickly. "You go out into the yard and find Buddy Hampton—you remember Buddy, don't you? Tell him you have to play quietly because you have a sore foot. I'll come after a while."

David drained his glass of milk, submitted to having the crumbs dusted from his blouse by Miss Gilly, and limped to the door and on out into the yard.

"He's run away," said Linda calmly, to the two who turned to her expectantly.

"Just what I say," Grandma agreed.

But little Miss Gilly fluttered her hands in distress.

"I can't believe it!" she protested. "He had such a lovely home with Mrs. Lawson. Miss Jackson told me he had a nurse and a governess and a wonderful garden to play in."

"Well, he's run away," repeated Linda. "I don't think he can have walked the twenty miles, but he has certainly walked a long distance; his shoes show that. And now what in the world are we going to do?"

Upstairs the carpenter pounded cheerily, the electricians shouted orders and questions across

the hall and the painters discussed the yesterday's ball score as they mixed their colors near an open window. In the kitchen two women and a girl stared at each other anxiously.

"Why didn't Mrs. Lawson adopt David before this?" said Grandma Poore.

"I don't know," Linda answered, for Miss Gilly seemed too upset to pay heed. "I thought she intended to adopt him almost at once, but she has kept putting it off. Perhaps she doesn't like him well enough, and David would know that. He is sensitive and keen-minded, for all he can't be more than five years old, and if she didn't love him and only gave him a home because she thought she ought to, he would know it as well as she did."

"I shouldn't be surprised if that was the answer," said Grandma Poore. "That child has run away because he doesn't want to stay where he isn't loved. Duty is a fine word, but it's always a little cold, to my way of thinking. David came straight to you, because he knows you love him and always have."

"Yes, Linda has always loved him," nodded Miss Gilly. "I remember her telling me the first time she saw him and how afraid he was of his grandfather. And then when they lived in that dreadful cabin in the woods and Linda tried to look after them a little, it was always

David that Linda wanted to help. When I came home from Virginia and she told me that he was to be adopted by a wealthy family, I was disappointed because she was. I knew she had dreamed of making him her little brother. And now here he is back again."

Linda's gray eyes began to sparkle. Grandma Poore smiled. Little Miss Gilly pursed her lips and merely looked demure.

"Aunt Carol—Aunt Carol, lamb!" cried Linda excitedly. "Do you really think—is there any chance—how can we manage—"

"To make David your little brother?" finished Miss Gilly. "Well, now, I don't say that it can be arranged, but I do not see any reason why it shouldn't be. I'll see Judge Mason right away, and of course we must telephone Mrs. Lawson. You'd better do that, Linda, I am apt to get incoherent over a telephone. Be sure you tell her the child is all right and that I'll write to her or come and see her within a day or so."

Linda dashed upstairs to give her opinion on the cream tint the painters had at last mixed to their satisfaction. She approved of the "carpinter's" window frames and the window seat that was being nailed into place beneath them—and she said not to put a base plug *there,* but to place it *there;* and all the time her heart was

pounding so that she thought everyone to whom she spoke must hear it beat.

"David, David, David!" her mind said over and over. "A real little brother—darling Aunt Carol, not to be afraid or doubtful or sorry, when the opportunity comes. Oh, I do like people who *rise* to occasions!"

The little brown house would have a telephone when all the "improvements" were in place, but now it was necessary to go across the street, for ordinary messages, or uptown, if one wished the privacy of the booth. Linda wished privacy and she whisked off uptown, thankful that the children were too busy to see her go. David was entertaining Buddy and Lucy as they sat on the grass, waiting with placid and infantile ghoulishness to see the scaffold fall "with both painters on it," according to Lucy's specifications.

"It is the lady's place to recognize her friends," said a gay voice, as Linda walked up Main Street at a rapid pace.

"She may smile and bow," Linda flashed impishly, "but she need not stop."

"Bother the etiquette book," said Jimmie Andrews.

CHAPTER III

ADD ONE BROTHER

Linda laughed and consented to pause.

"What do you think has happened, Jimmie?" she asked the boy, who wore a white coat and apron and carried a box of groceries under his arm.

"Mrs. Quincy is coming to visit you," said Jimmie mischievously.

Linda made a face at him. Mrs. Quincy was the matron of the institution in whose care the orphaned Linda had lived, to their mutual discomfort, it must be confessed, until she came to live with Miss Carol Gilly.

"David has come back," said Linda now.

But Jimmie had forgotten the silent little boy and the name conveyed nothing to him.

"David?" he echoed, puzzled.

"You know——" Linda prodded his memory. "He lived in that dreadful old cabin up on the mountain. You and I and Grandma Poore tramped up there the night his grandfather died."

"Sure we did. Guess I won't forget *that* in a hurry," admitted Jimmie. "But say, I thought David was adopted. Didn't some millionaire take him?"

"Mrs. Lawson did," Linda acknowledged. "I don't believe they're millionaires, but they are wealthy. We think David must have run away, for his heel has a dreadful blister on it and he seems tired out. I'm on my way now to the drug store booth to telephone and see if I can find out anything. You might as well ask the Sphinx to tell you things, as to ask David."

"Queer kid," was Jimmie's comment. "Something nice about him, too. Well, I see where you acquire a little brother."

Linda looked startled.

"How did you know?" she asked cautiously.

"Oh, your famous plan is no secret," Jimmie assured her. "Let's see" he began checking off on his fingers, "you have one aunt and one grandmother, and yourself. Now here's the obliging David for a little brother, and all you need are—well, I don't know exactly what you do need," he finished lamely.

"I want a big sister," declared Linda without hesitation, "and a little sister, maybe two little sisters, because they are too cunning. And a baby just old enough to walk would be nice."

She regarded Jimmie meditatively.

"I suppose I ought to have a big brother, too," she confided.

Jimmie Andrews shifted the weight of his heavy box to his other arm.

"You can just count me out," he announced coldly and was halfway up the street before Linda had recovered from her astonishment.

"Huh!" she thought indignantly as she made her way to the drug store and the soundproof booth with the door that never would quite shut, "Huh, he might wait till I asked him, at least. Yet he would make a nice big brother—I never thought much about it, but a big brother would be a help. Children," sighed fourteen-year-old Linda, "are such a responsibility to bring up properly."

To her relief the drug store was comparatively deserted and some attempt had been made to plan the door of the booth so that it almost closed. Linda put in her call for Watertown and waited patiently.

"Hello, hello!" a high-pitched voice answered at last. "No, this isn't Mrs. Lawson. She isn't home."

"Well," said Linda reasonably, "where is she?"

"She and her husband went down to Hot Springs," the voice trilled. "I'm her mother's cousin—do you wish to leave a message?"

"It is rather important," said Linda. "The little boy Mrs. Lawson intended to adopt, David, is at our house. We didn't know whether Mrs. Lawson knew where he was or not."

There was a moment of silence.

"So that's where he went," the high-pitched voice expressed surprise but no consternation. "I wonder if I ought to send the car for him?"

"We'd love to keep David," Linda assured the speaker. "And my aunt will write Mrs. Lawson if you will give me her address."

"That boy has been nothing but a trouble and a care to my cousin ever since she's had him," said the other end of the wire. "Nothing but a trouble and a care, and I don't mind telling you that when they come back from this trip, they're going to turn him over to the State Society. Mrs. Lawson has changed her mind about adopting him. I tell her she'd better take a little girl, anyway, you can manage a little girl."

Linda smiled rather wickedly. She had been "a little girl" and she had provided more discussion for the Board of Managers than any one small child had a right to total, but she did not dispute the question. Instead she listened intently and wrote down the Hot Springs address as it was given.

"She never asked how David was, or how he reached Morrisville," Linda thought, a bit resentfully, as she stepped out of the booth. "I should think it would be natural for her to wonder how a five-year-old boy could cover twenty miles and not lose his way."

Hurrying back to the little brown house, where so many interesting things were being done, Linda found David and Buddy and Lucy still patiently waiting catastrophe, and the "carpinter" whistling "Just as the Sun Went Down" while he straddled the window sill and blissfully hammered shining new nails into clean white wood.

Linda told Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore the result of her phone call and it was tacitly agreed that Miss Gilly would write Mrs. Lawson that night and that until they heard from her there was nothing to do but take care of David and keep a watchful eye on him.

"For all we know, he may like commuting," bubbled Linda, "and he is just as likely to hike back to Watertown with the same idea of getting a change of scene."

"How you talk!" reproved Miss Gilly. "However, we certainly need not feel called upon to send him back to anyone so unfeeling as that cousin. I'll write Mrs. Lawson to-night, and David might as well start in school, Mon-

day. He needn't miss all the rest of the term."

Linda gurgled with delight. Miss Gilly was such a mixture of the poetical and the practical. Mrs. Hampton complained that she "fell in" with Linda's plans, whether they were wise or not, but Mrs. Hampton failed to realize that Miss Gilly was blessed with a fund of common sense that never deserted her. She could soar, but as Linda had once observed to Jimmie Andrews, she "soared on one foot."

"By that I mean," she had elaborated, "she never quite leaves the earth."

David could not have chosen a worse time, from the housekeeper's point of view, to pay a visit. There was literally no place for him to sleep.

"He can have a bed on the floor and he will love it," said Linda. "It is always more exciting to sleep on the floor, than in a regular bed. He can have a mattress and pretend that he is camping out. All boys like that."

So one problem was settled and Linda was again free to give her mind to the more fascinating questions of whether the molding should be painted white to match the woodwork, or left dark to match the furniture.

She was busy till noon and lunch was to be a picnic affair on the kitchen table. But David,

when called, appeared attended by the devoted Buddy and Lucy.

Miss Gilly found three bibs instead of one and remarked sotto voce to Linda, "Well you're the one who wanted brothers and sisters."

The children divided their attention between their own meal and the workmen who ate their lunches in the yard, under the shelter of the back porch. David said scarcely a word, but Buddy and Lucy supplied plenty of conversation. Their mother, they explained between bites of sandwiches, had gone shopping. It was perfectly marvelous, Linda had often thought, the speed and dispatch with which Mrs. Hampton went shopping as soon as Buddy and Lucy were accounted for.

Linda herself, as she ate, was thinking rather confusedly. David's return had turned her thoughts backward and their natural trend was forward, especially since the renovation of the house all pointed to the future.

But, sampling currant bun, Linda remembered the fall when she and Grandma Poore had kept house while Miss Gilly nursed the Cousin Dorothea who had died before the holidays and left Miss Gilly with money enough to keep her in comfort the rest of her days. Miss Gilly was a dressmaker and she had taken Linda, a ward of the State, to board with her, an ar-

rangement that had resulted in a loving relationship. Linda's pet plan, often discussed with her "Aunt Carol," had been to grow up as fast as possible, earn money and gather a "regular" family about her, one, she stipulated, with brothers and sisters and an aunt or so. The necessity for a grandmother had been made plain by Mrs. Poore, who was the ideal grandma, if there ever was one. And what more natural, from Miss Gilly's rather individual viewpoint, than for the dressmaker to use her inheritance in making Linda's plan come true?

To be sure a great many people said she was foolish and would live to rue the day. In the first place, they pointed out, her cousin's money didn't make her fabulously wealthy. It merely assured her a comfortable income. She and Linda could travel, perhaps, have a home at the seashore if they liked, employ two or three maids and have charming clothes. But as for bringing up a large family of children and giving them "advantages," why, it would take a fortune and a large one at that!

"I've been lonely a good many years," said Miss Gilly to her critics. "I have wanted young life around me, a long, long time. Linda has the dash and go I have always lacked, and with her to help me, I know we can make a success of what may sound like an experiment. As

for 'advantages', there are thousands of children to whom a real home with love and training and a chance for a practical education represent the most coveted advantages. Linda and I mean to give such children a chance, and we have the house, one grandmother, a sister and an aunt, all ready," she always finished triumphantly.

Grandma Poore was without close relatives and had depended on day nursing and sewing to give her a living income. A home where she was welcome and a room which she could feel belonged to her, was luxury. She, too, was sure that Linda's plan was practical.

Now the "family" had a little brother, thought Linda, staring absently at the chicken yard, one corner of which could be seen from the kitchen window. She was sure that David would live permanently with them. That cool high-pitched voice had been assurance enough that he was not wanted in the handsome Lawson house.

"I see you've fixed the chicken yard," said David, breaking in on Linda's meditations.

"Yes, I finished the lace collar I was making for Mrs. Farrington, remember it, David?" she asked him.

He nodded, his dark eyes watching her over his glass of milk.

"Mr. Farrington liked it so much, he paid me thirty-five dollars and I bought everything I wanted for the chicken yard and had enough left over for Cristmas presents," said Linda.

"I'll feed the chickens for you, if you want me to," David offered, making no comment about the collar.

"Thank you, David," said Linda. "I'll remember that. I expect to be ever so busy next week, when we start rehearsing for the school play."

"Does he have to go to school?" asked Buddy.

Buddy and Lucy went to school, this spring their first attempt, and they were not always enthusiastic.

"He certainly does," Miss Gilly announced. "You'll have company, Buddy."

"There's the 'carpinter' looking for you, Linda," said Lucy shrilly.

CHAPTER IV

CASTING THE PLAY

Linda went upstairs to choose hinges for the window seat, and the rest of the afternoon she flew up and down stairs, trying, as so many feminine and ambitious creatures do, to be "in three or four places at once."

The children were in the yard and Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore were entertaining an inquisitive caller in the dismantled living room where the paper had been torn off and the woodwork sandpapered, preparatory to being refinished, when a loud shriek sent everyone scurrying out to the side yard.

Linda said afterward that she was sure the scaffold had fallen, as Buddy and Lucy had earlier predicted. Miss Gilly inclined to the theory that Independence, Linda's beloved dog had bitten some one, and Grandma Poore panted that she hoped David had not been kidnaped.

No one expected the sight which confronted them—David and Buddy paint from head to foot and fighting still for the possession of the

nearly empty can. From the scaffold, now halfway down the side of the house, a lusty and angry voice was shouting: "If I catch you kids, I'll make it hot for you!"

Linda hesitated only an instant. Then she dashed forward and parted the two belligerents, not without a sigh for her smock which she knew would inevitably be smeared with the paint.

"Stop it!" she commanded sternly. "You must want a spanking—I never saw two worse looking objects!" she added in dismay.

But Miss Gilly, mindful of her responsibility as a neighbor, had another worry.

"Where in the world is Lucy!" she exclaimed.

"Back of the house," sobbed Buddy angrily. "She's got a whole paint pot to herself!"

Linda dashed for the back of the house. Grandma Poore and the visitor stared at each other in mute horror. Then Linda appeared leading a small girl by the hand. If the boys were covered, Lucy was drenched. She had selected green paint and it was in her hair, on her face and dripping in torrents on her shoes.

"I think I'll be going," the visitor murmured politely, moving toward the street.

No one sought to stay her. She had on a lovely twill tailored frock and she was not to

blame if she declined to be mixed up in any such wholesale cleaning process as the situation before her indicated.

"I'll get you some turpentine, ma'am," said one of the painters, disappearing into the house, via the open window.

He came out with a large bottle of turpentine and explained how it should be used.

"I suppose we're to blame for leaving the paint around where they could get into it," he said apologetically, while the three culprits stood lined up before him.

"But we figured there weren't any children in your house and we got a little careless. These," he waved his hand toward the small sinners, "belong to you?"

"Well, no, not exactly," said Miss Gilly. "Two live next door and David is staying with us. But I think from now on, you'd better count on having three children around. They will go to school though, Monday, and that will be a help."

Miss Gilly offered to tackle Lucy, and Linda went to work at the two boys. It was tedious and she did not feel inclined to be any too patient, but she refrained from scolding. In the course of her ministrations, she drew out the fact that it was David who had suggested they play with the paint and it had been his desire

to keep it for his exclusive use that had started the quarrel. During the fracas, the canny Lucy had seized a pot for herself and retired to safer ground to investigate its contents.

"I don't know what your mother will say to you," said Linda to Buddy, soaping his head vigorously.

"What you going to say to David?" he asked curiously.

Linda, from the corner of her eye, saw that David was listening.

"I haven't decided," she said as grimly as she could.

But by the time Buddy and Lucy were scraped clean enough to go home, Linda had reached a conclusion.

"It was really David's fault," she said to Miss Gilly, "and I think for three good reasons, the thing to do is to pin him up in a blanket and keep him that way over Sunday."

"And the three reasons?" suggested Miss Gilly, her eyes twinkling.

"Well, one is that we haven't any more clothes for him," Linda submitted. "And one is that as long as he is pinned into a blanket, he will be a trifle subdued and, I hope and trust, keep out of battle. And the third reason is that a little discipline won't hurt him. I could go and ask Mrs. Andrews if she would lend

him another suit of Jimmie's, as she did before, but I'm not going to."

So David was pinned into a blanket and established on the sofa with a book, while Linda took the two Hampton children home. She was always returning them to their mother, she reflected whimsically, and seldom under cheerful circumstances.

Mrs. Hampton took one look at her offspring, heard what had happened, and immediately sent them to bed. She had had long practice in dealing with delinquents and her punishments were almost automatic.

"But children are a great care, you can not deny it," said Linda soberly to Independence, who had followed her, as she closed the Hampton door.

The Sunday which followed the paint episode was calm and peaceful. David, pinned in his blanket, was his usual silent self, but he welcomed the novelty of sleeping on a mattress placed on the floor and he was evidently settled, in his own mind, as far as the question of staying was concerned. He had plainly dismissed all thoughts connected with his life at Watertown.

Monday morning Linda started for school with a small train of more or less willing attendants. Buddy and Lucy and David, of course, were on hand, but three or four other

youngsters who lived at strategic points on the thoroughfare, also indicated their intentions of joining the party.

"You got his suit fixed, didn't you?" said Buddy, as he saw the rejuvenated David.

"Yes, most of the spots are off," Linda agreed.

"Don't forget we're going to be elves," said Lucy mysteriously and as at a given signal the others, with the exception of David, set up a warning chorus.

"Don't forget we're going to be elves!" they chanted.

Linda gazed upon Lucy with a strong desire to shake her.

"You know perfectly well the parts haven't been assigned yet. I don't know that I'll have anything to say about the cast at all," she declared, the reason for her excessive popularity suddenly explained.

"Well, there's going to be a meeting this afternoon—I heard Edith Groves say so," said Lucy. "And everyone says you'll be stage manager and can do just as you please. You're so bossy, you can make the play good without a bit of trouble."

Linda flushed. She knew Lucy was merely quoting some one else, but the charge of being "bossy" was one Linda always dreaded. She

was blessed with a large amount of executive ability and, like all such endowed characters, had constantly to be on guard lest she seem to dictate. It had been rumored that she was to be named stage manager for the play which the graduating class of the grammar school was to present early in June, and this Monday a meeting had been called by the play committee to discuss the cast and assign the parts. Rumor had reached the lower grades that the play chosen called for elves and that the younger children in the school would be selected to fill that space on the program. Ergo, if Linda Lane was to be stage manager, she would choose the minor rôles and therefore it behooved all ambitious children to call her attention to their admirable fitness.

By the time the school grounds were reached, most of the youngsters walking with Linda were dressed, figuratively speaking, in what Lucy called "those cunning green suits" (which by the way she had never seen) and they were waving wands and performing other magic feats that endangered their arms and legs, to say nothing of the new spring lawns they passed.

Linda breathed a sigh of relief when the red brick building claimed them, the silent David with the rest. To be sure, there was the walk

home at noon for lunch, and the return, but she had had a respite and there was the class meeting to look forward to at the close of the afternoon session.

David was instructed to go straight home with Buddy and Lucy, and Linda hurried to the auditorium where her class was already assembled, the boys gravitating to one side of the big room and the girls to the other, much like a Quaker meeting, though for morning exercises boys and girls sat just as they happened to march in.

The committee was on the platform as Linda slipped into a seat next to Edith Groves. Two teachers and two boys and two girls from the class had been empowered to choose a suitable play and to assemble a cast. No matter how carefully guarded, news has a way of filtering through a school and though no public announcement had so far been made, practically every grade in the building knew that the play decided upon was a phantasy, called "The Rose Jar." Also that there would be elves.

So it was not altogether with surprise that the waiting audience heard Miss Bascom, the English teacher, make her announcement.

"The play the committee has chosen," she said in her clear, well-modulated voice, "is 'The Rose Jar,' in two acts. It has a cast of twelve

principals and a large chorus, including a dozen or more elves. We think that a play which offers an opportunity for the majority of the class always stands a better chance of success than one in which the interests are narrowed."

Miss Bascom sat down and Jimmie Andrews came to the front of the platform. He held a typewritten list of names in his hand and a little ripple of excitement went over the auditorium. They might know in advance the title of the play and a few of the less important details, but any discussion of the cast could be only conjecture until the reports were confirmed.

"In choosing the cast," said Jimmie composedly, "the committee has been governed by one aim—the success of the play. There can be no room for personal dislikes or jealousies or any kind of envy in a senior class play. We've got to pull together and do team work."

He surveyed the expectant faces with a gravity quite foreign to his usual sunny expression.

"Good gracious!" whispered Edith to Linda, "Jimmie looks as though he had a good deal on his mind."

As a matter of fact, he did. Every committee, of any experience, knows that it is a thankless task to assemble a cast for a school play and that the mention of the first selection

is enough to start a train of discontent or envy, or perhaps open rebellion, among those who have not been given the coveted parts.

"We unanimously decided to appoint Linda Lane stage manager," said Jimmie. "She will have full power to appoint the committees on costumes and scenery, and to select the chorus and fill the minor rôles. The feminine lead"—Jimmie was a little proud of that phrase—"the feminine lead," he repeated, "has been assigned to Edith Groves."

The pretty girl seated next to Linda blushed and across the aisle an acid voice was raised in a shrill whisper:

"I guess this play is going to be team work, all right—those two girls will have everything their own way and the rest of us will do all the work."

But Jimmie was announcing the hero and there was no time to indulge in recrimination.

CHAPTER V

TACT GOES A LONG WAY

"To Play opposite Edith Groves," read Jimmie smoothly, "we have selected Willard Marsh."

The boys gazed upon Willard curiously, pityingly, or appraisingly as their natures dictated, but Linda was sure there was no envy in their glances. Boys, she reflected, did not "fuss" as readily as girls.

Jimmie went on, until he had named the twelve principals, and how many seeds of discord he sowed at the same time, the future alone could tell. He wound up with the committee's report, a tentative date for the presentation of the play—the proceeds were to be used to buy a gift from the class for the school—and the announcement that the first rehearsal would be held the next afternoon.

As the class filed out, Linda overheard a girl remark that she thought Jimmie Andrews would make a much better actor than Willard Marsh.

"I suppose because he was on the committee, he couldn't give himself the lead," commented the speaker.

"That may have had something to do with it," sagely responded some one else, "but I don't believe Jimmie could give the time to rehearsals. He works afternoons, you know, and all day Saturday."

Outside on the steps, Linda found Buddy and Lucy and David, sitting placidly in a row. They lifted beaming faces at her approach.

"Make us a elve, Linda," Lucy begged.

"An elf," corrected Linda mechanically.

"All right, an elf," Lucy said amiably. "Make us one."

Linda did not feel equal to attacking another grammatical problem, so she said that if they were going home with her, now was the time to start. Edith Groves walked with them halfway and the talk was all of the play.

"Wouldn't it be awful," said Edith, "if we didn't make a success of it? There are plenty of critics in Morrisville, you know."

"That's no way to begin," Linda scolded. "Of course we'll put it over. Look at our leading lady."

"Look at our stage manager, you mean," countered Edith affectionately. "They knew what they were doing, when they named you,

Linda. But did you hear Janice Adams?"

"Certainly I heard her, but one critic doesn't spoil a show," Linda retorted. "That girl wouldn't be running true to form, if she didn't put in a little dig wherever opportunity presented. However, something tells me there never was a class play without some bickering and I have yet to hear of a class play that was a flat failure."

"Well, of course the parents guarantee some kind of an audience," admitted Edith, who seemed to be depressed in spirits, "but we want to make a heap of money and get something really fine for the school. So you see a good deal depends on how many tickets there are sold."

Linda gazed at her chum thoughtfully.

"It seems to me that you're worrying pretty far in advance," she observed, "and not only that, but about things you do not really have to give a thought to. Let the business manager get gray hair over selling the tickets if he must —all you have to do is to be beautiful and graceful and send our play down in history as the finest play ever given in Morrisville Grammar School."

Edith laughed and promised to concentrate on "the beautiful and graceful part," and then, having reached her corner, turned up one

street, while Linda and the children continued on.

Lucy had a single-track mind, if there ever was one, and she had set her heart on being an elf. She reminded Linda of her ambition at three-minute intervals and would have followed her into the house to press home the importance of being made an elf, had not Linda tactfully suggested that she and Buddy must be needed by their mother.

What Linda did not think it necessary to mention, was that she had seen the neat little closed car of the social worker, Miss Jackson, standing at the curb. This meant that Miss Jackson was inside the house and would, undoubtedly be eager for news of David.

"Hello, Linda," the young-looking, gray-haired woman talking to Miss Gilly greeted her. "And David, too! I'm not sure I should have driven down to-day if I had known about David," she added, more as if to herself.

David surveyed the caller silently and as silently accepted Grandma Poore's suggestion that he come out in the kitchen and help her string beans.

Miss Gilly, Linda thought, looked a little excited and as soon as David was out of the room, the reason was forthcoming.

"Linda," said Miss Gilly, "Miss Jackson has been telling us about a little girl the Society is offering for adoption."

"How perfectly lovely," said Linda in turn, so promptly that Miss Jackson laughed.

"It doesn't happen to be 'perfectly lovely,' unfortunately," she explained. "Patty has a fearful temper, I'm sorry to tell you."

"She has a pretty name, anyway," Miss Gilly affirmed appreciatively.

Miss Jackson's eyes twinkled.

"That child's name," she announced impressively, "must be heard to be appreciated. It is 'Patience'."

Linda and Miss Gilly smiled.

"Perhaps that is what makes her so short-tempered," suggested Linda. "I'm almost sure if I had been named Patience, I'd feel it was my duty to demonstrate that a name doesn't necessarily describe one's characteristics."

"Well, poor Patty never had any such thoughts," Miss Jackson said positively. "She's just plain hot-tempered and always in trouble. I did think of asking Miss Gilly to take her for a few months, but that was before I knew about David. I feel sorry for Patty, because she has some lovable qualities and doesn't get much credit for them. She has an uncanny facility for stirring up trouble where-

ever she goes and Mrs. Quincy flatly refuses to place her in another home."

"Dear me," said Linda mischievously, "that has a familiar sound."

"Well, in a way Patty does remind me of you, Linda," the social worker acknowledged. "But she is only four years old and her temper is the biggest part of her."

Linda turned impulsively to Miss Gilly.

"Can't we take her, Aunt Carol?" she begged. "I hate to have a little girl unhappy and cooped up in those rooms while it is so nice out of doors. The room upstairs will be finished this week and then we'll have a place for her and for David, too."

And the highly impractical Miss Gilly, instead of saying, "Why I never heard of such a crazy notion!" nodded calmly and said she didn't see any reason why Patty shouldn't be asked to come and live with them.

"For a few months, at least," said Miss Gilly. "She may, of course, not be happy here, either. But we'll see. And if Linda has set her heart on having a little sister, we mustn't overlook any opportunity that comes."

Miss Jackson could not stay for supper, but before she left it was arranged that she should bring the impatient Patty down to Morrisville the following week when the little brown house

would be, presumably, delivered out of the hands of the workmen and order would have been restored.

"I should think you'd feel slightly dazed," commented Linda, as she stood with her arm around Miss Gilly's shoulders, watching the social worker drive away. "This collecting a family seems to be quicker work than I expected. I suppose it shows how many children there are who need homes."

"Something tells me we have a busy spring ahead of us," Miss Gilly murmured. "David is secretive and not a pacifist and here comes Patty with a ready-made reputation for explosiveness."

"And the class play and graduation," added Linda.

"Well, we might as well be occupied," Miss Gilly said philosophically. "You can't have a houseful of children and hope to have much time for folding your hands."

Linda gave her an enthusiastic hug.

"There never was, and never will be, an aunt like you," she assured the little woman. "You're perfect!"

Which was, Miss Gilly protested, perfect nonsense, but delightful to hear.

The next afternoon, after school, Linda took precautions to send David and the Hampton

children home as soon as the session was over. This she accomplished by announcing that no one who was found in the school yard ten minutes after three o'clock, should be an elf, if she had anything to say about it. As it was well known that she had everything to say about it, the kindergarten and primary grades scattered like snowflakes beneath the sun and Miss Gilly later reported that David and Lucy and Buddy must have run every step of the way, for they reached the house crimson and quite breathless.

The rehearsal meeting was informal from the start and the platform was promptly made the center of activity.

"Did you decide on your committees?" asked Jimmie Andrews, coming up to Linda. "The costumes and the scenery are pretty important. The coach is coming to-morrow and then I drop out of the scene. Farrington won't stand for any more afternoons off."

"I don't think that's fair," Linda declared, ignoring the question of committees for the time being. "There's only one senior play."

"But this is his busiest season and he can get plenty of help through the winter when things are slow," explained Jimmie. "It's no fair for me to take it easy during the winter and be paid a salary and then, just when the seeds and agricultural stuff are picking up and business is

booming, ask for a lot of time off for myself."

"Oh, of course you'd see Mr. Farrington's side of it," smiled Linda. "Never mind, when you own half the grocery store, perhaps you'll have a chance to play a little."

"I play enough," said Jimmie sturdily.

Linda had her committee lists ready and revealed, as she read them, a comprehensive knowledge of the talents of her fellow classmates, as well as a tactful ability to distribute coveted favors over the widest possible area.

"As chairman of the costumes, I appoint Janice Adams," read Linda clearly. "She has full power to appoint her committee and any subcommittees she may find necessary."

A little buzz started, but as Linda read other names rapidly, discussion of her choice had to be postponed.

She appointed Blake Marsh, a brother of Willard, as chairman of the scenery committee and this announcement was greeted with something like applause. Blake was a delight to the art supervisor and he was even now enrolled in some of the high school classes for art work. He had a wonderful sense of color values and a firm conviction that when he grew up he was going to have his own theater and do nothing but "sets." Blake, too, was given the privilege of selecting his own committee mates.

Linda announced that for the chorus she had drawn upon the school at large, after consulting the music teacher's reports. A number of good voices, she insisted, was imperative. And then she followed up the chorus list with the names of the dozen elves. Buddy and Lucy and David were included, because they were small and very tiny elves were a necessity for the stage was to be crowded to capacity by the large chorus.

"Everything is all right," said May Henderson as the meeting disbanded, "but why on earth did she let Janice Adams take control of the costumes?"

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST DIFFERENCE

Edith Groves put the same question to Linda, but more from motives of curiosity, than disapproval.

"She can sew," said Linda calmly. "She can sew exquisitely. And, while I may be wrong, I think a chairman who can sew ought to be helpful on a costume committee. Now if I were doing it, anyone could slip in a couple of safety pins and I wouldn't know the difference, but Janice will insist on needle and thread."

"So would you," the loyal Edith declared. "I'd like to see anyone shirk when you're around, Linda Lane."

But Janice Adams at first said she would have nothing to do with the play or any committee, much less plan the costumes. Then she decided that it was for the good of the school, and for the good of the school she would sacrifice her personal feelings and give her talents freely.

"The play," grinned Linda to Jimmie Andrews, "gets away to a creaking start."

Linda was apt to think differences of opinion "funny" and while this attitude was found to be distinctly irritating by those who opposed her, in the end it settled or smoothed over various irritations more quickly than if she had lost her temper and plunged into a quarrel.

"Are we an elf?" demanded Lucy, the moment she spied Linda coming down the street.

Linda laughed. Lucy was followed by Buddy and David and they looked not unlike elves that very moment. Mischievous elves at that.

"You are," said Linda serenely. "You're an elf, and Buddy is an elf, and David is an elf. And you'll have to go to every rehearsal and stand perfectly still while the girls fit clothes on you—and goodness, you'll have to be good; there are so many children who want to be elves that the first one who is bad will be dropped by the coach like a hot cake. And then some one else will get the little green suit."

This dreadful picture made a profound impression. Linda could fairly see three small brains registering strong determination to be as good as gold, at least until that wonderful play rang down the final curtain.

"What is a coach?" asked David, breaking his chronic silence.

"Some one who teaches the players their parts, how to act, when to come in and go out,"

Linda said carelessly. "Our coach is a Miss Haverstraw: she'll be there to-morrow."

"Lu-cy!" called Mrs. Hampton. "Bud-dy!"

"Can we stay after school to-morrow?" Lucy demanded hastily.

"Yes," said Linda. "Fly—flee—march!"

The children turned to run. Already the good influence of the play was being made manifest.

"Can we stay as long as you do?" Buddy shouted over his shoulder.

"Maybe," said Linda.

"David is a restful child," she proclaimed at the supper table that night. "He can keep still. I don't know whether I've made a mistake putting Buddy and Lucy in as elves or not. How do I know they won't rise up in the middle of the big scene and cry: 'Linda, can I do this? Linda, where you going? Say, Linda, let me go with you'?"

Grandma Poore and Miss Gilly laughed, recognizing familiar sentences.

"They'll be all right," the former prophesied. "If anything, they will have stage fright and have to be carried on and off."

It was fortunate, Linda announced to Independence in the days that followed—she gave the dog a good many of her confidences because he was what might be termed a safe "receptacle" —that she had chosen the wall paper and the

color for the woodwork and where the phone was to go and what color the house should be painted, for the moment rehearsals began for the play, she had hardly a free moment. The workmen left, the house was put in order, the two new little bedrooms, brave in flowered paper, white paint and two small white iron beds, were made ready, one for David and one for Patty. But Linda hardly knew when these things were done. She was unbelievably busy with the details incidental to presenting the biggest and best play ever given by any senior class of any grammar school.

The Tuesday when the coach was present for the first time, had proved to be a momentous occasion.

Miss Haverstraw was a small, slight, blonde person with direct blue eyes, a lovely voice and a gift for issuing orders and seeing that they were obeyed.

"Now the thing to do is make everyone do his fair share," she said briskly to Linda. "In every school there is always some one who is willing to stand on the sidelines and watch other people do all the work. In the presentation of a play, there is room for just one such person—that is the coach."

"Yes'm," dimpled Linda.

"Therefore," streamed on the lovely, limpid

voice of Miss Haverstraw, "we want to decide what is a fair division of labor, outline it beyond any question of argument and then see to it that no one gets out of step. Are you one of these people who, if a thing is not going to suit you, takes hold and does it yourself?"

"I don't know—perhaps," Linda admitted guiltily.

"Yes, you would be," nodded Miss Haverstraw. "It is a fatal mistake and don't let me catch you committing it. Now let's go out and meet the company."

They had been talking in the small curtained recess that served as the main dressing room and as Linda followed the coach out on the stage where the entire cast and chorus was assembled, she knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that "The Rose Jar" was going to be an unqualified success.

"I'll read the play through to you, first," said Miss Haverstraw when she had been presented by Linda, "and as I reach the various characters, I'll ask you to step forward."

She began to read, her beautiful voice making poetry of the words and as the plot unfolded the cast, enthralled by the vista she opened up to them, remained so spellbound that it was with difficulty Linda could rouse them to come forward.

When Miss Haverstraw reached the elves, she stopped and inspected the dozen small plump persons lined up before her.

"They'll have to sing," she announced. "There is no song for them written in the score, but we can not waste such an opportunity. It is the business of elves to spread sweetness and light and if this gay aggregation comes out trilling, the audience will take them to its collective heart."

After the reading of the play, the various groups, under their chairmen, were informed of the time set for practice and rehearsal. Twice a week, until June, when the play was to be given, there would be a rehearsal of the full cast. The chorus was to practice every day, the others alternate days. And the elves, who were to dance and sing, were down for daily drilling.

"Yes, it's a good deal of work," said Miss Haverstraw, when Janice Adams approached her with this question. "And yes, I am aware that many plays have been produced with less preparation. But I have never coached them. Whether it is a kindergarten program, a school play or a college pageant, I insist on constant practice. There is no substitute for systematic drill and the only way to become letter-perfect is to work."

Janice Adams could draw cleverly as well as

"Certainly," Janice spoke sharply, "I think blue will be lovely."

sew and she had brought a set of sketches for some of the costumes.

"I thought I'd set the girls at work on the suits for the elves first," announced Janice, handing her sheaf of papers to Miss Haverstraw.

"Your stage manager passes on these—not I," the coach pointed out.

Linda took the papers while Janice flushed slightly.

"You're not going to have the elves wear blue suits, are you?" asked Linda, examining the sketches with interest.

"Certainly,"—Janice spoke sharply. "I think blue will be lovely."

"Elves," Linda spoke positively, "always wear green."

"Well, these won't," announced Janice. "I'm chairman of the costume committee and I have a perfect right to choose the colors and the costumes."

Linda remembered that she was supposed to be diplomatic.

"I think your designs are lovely," she declared. "But, Janice, we can not have blue elves. They won't look right, the traditional elf is green and I am afraid people won't know the children are elves if they see them in blue suits."

"That's perfect nonsense," scolded Janice,

frowning. "An elf is an elf and they'll be on the program and only assorted dumbbells will take them for anything else."

Linda bit her lip. She was tempted to appeal to Miss Haverstraw, or to Miss Bascom, the teacher who had helped to choose the play. But Linda had a plentiful supply of independence and she disliked to admit that she couldn't handle her own problems.

"I'm sorry," she said with dignity, "but I can not o. k. these sketches unless you promise to dress the elves in green."

The auditorium was very still. Everyone was listening with strained attention. Linda supposed that the dispute would have a bad effect on the children, but it was too late to think of that now.

"You needn't o. k. them," answered Janice. "I don't see that it is at all necessary. I'll be able to get along."

Linda sensed that if Janice gained this victory, it would be an opening wedge. And coöperation and a united front must be secured and retained.

"All bills have to be approved by the business manager and by me," said Linda very quietly. "No money will be paid out, unless the voucher carries two signatures."

"Now there," said Fred Vaney, who had been

made business manager, "is a girl with a head on her shoulders."

He spoke to Jimmie Andrews, who nodded shortly without replying.

Janice contented herself with muttering that she would buy the goods for the suits herself, if she had to, but no one took this threat seriously.

The music supervisor for the town schools suggested that it might be a good idea to "run over" the music and Linda grasped gratefully at this plan. The music was gay and tuneful and when the rehearsal was formally dismissed by Miss Haverstraw, the atmosphere was appreciably clearer.

"Good for the initial meeting," pronounced the coach, drawing on her gray suede gloves and studying Linda and Edith who, on her invitation, were to walk with her to the train.

"What we have to watch out for," Miss Haverstraw continued, "is a slump of enthusiasm. This is an ambitious production and we'll all have to work and work hard. I think it will be lovely, and there is no reason why it should not be a success. But every member of the cast will have to do a little bit more than is expected of him."

Linda was silent, but Edith, retrieving her "part" from under a corner chair, made one sage remark.

"My only hope is that we live through it," said she.

Miss Haverstraw laughed and slipped a friendly hand through Linda's arm.

"We'll all live and we'll manage to extract the maximum enjoyment from the practice," she predicted. "Taken in the right spirit, play rehearsals can be made thoroughly enjoyable. It would be a pity to miss all the fun—and you will, if you let your minds dwell too constantly on the difficulties. Is that clock right? Then we'd better hurry."

Miss Haverstraw was to come the next Friday. Linda had three committee conferences to attend before there would be another general rehearsal. It was not surprising, therefore, when David asked her, "Is Patty coming this week?" she answered, "No, thank goodness."

CHAPTER VII

A NEW THORN

"I no hope you won't get all tired out," said Miss Gilly anxiously as Linda, her studying finished that evening, spread out the memoranda that had to do with the play.

"After it gets really started, there won't be so much to do," Linda assured her. "There's a fearful mass of detail now, but it will gradually fall into shape."

"I don't like Janice Adams," proclaimed David, who was flat on the rug, with Independence nearly on top of him.

David's remarks invariably made Miss Gilly jump. He was such a quiet child that when he did speak it had the effect of a suddenly lighted firecracker.

"Janice Adams?" repeated Miss Gilly. "Isn't her aunt Mrs. Carson?"

Miss Gilly was accustomed to identifying names by establishing family connections and usually it developed that she had made dresses for some one who was related to some one else.

"She's a pretty girl with light hair," Grandma Poore announced. "They live over on Cliff Street. Moved to Morrisville while you were away, Carol."

"I don't like her," repeated David.

"Well it's high time you were in bed," Linda informed him severely. "If you're going to be an elf, you need plenty of sleep."

"Why?" questioned David, who was never adverse to argument.

"Because elves are bright and no one can be bright who doesn't get enough sleep," Linda advanced promptly. "Also it is in the contract, remember, that you are to be as good as gold."

"I thought that meant just in school," said David sadly.

Linda laughed and said it meant "everywhere."

Seeing that she would not soften, David stumbled sleepily to his feet and submitted to being kissed by Miss Gilly and Linda. He never offered to kiss them voluntarily, yet Linda knew that in his heart he adored demonstrations of affection. Sometimes she saw him furtively kissing and hugging Independence. Grandma Poore had sensed this responsiveness, too, and without consulting David, she had made it a practice, since his return, to go up and see him

every night, after he was in bed. David, by word or caress, did not give a sign that this meant anything to him, but the lonely little lad would never forget.

He went upstairs obediently. The electricity was so nice, Linda said, where there were children, for they could put the lights on and off as easily as an adult, and in the interval before Grandma Poore followed him, Linda briefly outlined what had happened at the rehearsal.

"Doesn't that show how quick children are?" she commented. "I couldn't be sure the smaller ones knew there was dissension. But David knew—probably every one of those youngsters is spreading the glad news under the evening lamp that Janice Adams and Linda Lane quarreled about the elves' costumes."

"Oh, I wouldn't call that a quarrel," said Grandma mildly. "Those little differences are bound to crop up where a number are working for the same end. It will blow over—you'll see."

"Couldn't I help with the costumes?" Miss Gilly asked wistfully. "I'd love to sew, if it would be of any help."

"Darling, you'd break the girls' hearts, if you took a stitch," said Linda. "This is a school production and those who can't act can at least have a finger in the pie by sewing and painting scenery. That reminds me, I must see Blake

Marsh about the setting for the first act tomorrow."

She resumed her scribbling and Grandma Poore went up to see David. Miss Gilly dozed over the paper, till the shrill ringing of the telephone roused her.

"Edith Groves wants to speak to you, Linda," she announced, returning from the hall.

"I didn't know for sure that you were connected yet," said Edith's voice as Linda took the receiver, "but I see you are. Linda, whom do you suppose Blake Marsh has put on his committee?—Estelle Carr!"

Linda was silent.

"Why don't you say something?" demanded Edith.

"I think I'm waiting for words," Linda admitted. "Estelle Carr—well, Edith what is there left to be said?"

"Not much, except I'm sorry for you," said Edith. "And you may be sure that Janice persuaded Blake. He's so good-natured and so crazy about painting that half the time he doesn't know what people are saying to him. In some such somnambulent state, he has said 'yes,' when Janice asked him to please appoint Estelle."

Linda hung up the receiver a few moments later, wondering if the job of stage manager

wasn't the most exacting in the world. Discounting Edith's tendency to look at the dark side, a tendency but recently developed and due, no doubt, to her nervousness which would increase before it would be better (Edith was an excellent actress but she drove her family and friends crazy when cast in a play, until the opening night. When on the stage however, she forgot herself completely and invariably came in for whole-hearted and thundering applause) discounting this pessimistic attitude, there was no use in trying to find a bright lining to her latest dark cloud. Estelle Carr was a thorn in the side of the Morrisville teachers and not even her friends knew what she would do next. She was a tall girl with a loud voice, bluff manners and advanced ideas. She was almost sixteen and should have been in high school, but her interests had never centered on her school work and her graduation from the grammar grades had been painfully delayed. She was an orphan, with "her own money" the girls were fond of saying enviously, though as a matter of fact Estelle would not have her own money until she was twenty-one years old. Meanwhile she rejoiced in a generous allowance from an indulgent guardian with whom, and an elderly sister, she lived. They had never pretended to understand her and Estelle had followed her own sweet will

since a tiny girl. To her everlasting credit nothing worse was ever said of her than that she was spoiled, ill-bred and extremely noisy. She had a habit of slapping her friends, girls or boys, on the back, whenever she met them and it was a tradition in Morrisville that she had once saluted the dignified Judge Mason in this same informal fashion.

When the Adams family moved to town, Janice and Estelle had struck up an ardent friendship. Probably both were lonely, for Janice was a newcomer and Estelle had so many oddities that she never succeeded in annexing a chum. Whatever the reason, they were soon inseparable and seemed to be congenial, though on the surface they had little in common.

Estelle's latest whim had been a studio. She had demanded a "real" one in the city, but her easy-going guardian had for once denied her expressed wish and was not to be wheedled into changing his mind. Then Estelle had fitted up an old barn on the outskirts of the town and there spent hours, in an orange and green smock, painting what she fondly believed to be landscapes. What she lacked in knowledge, she made up in equipment and her paints and canvas and brushes made Blake Marsh almost as green as her favorite smock, with envy. Estelle had no more idea of color than a cat, so said the Mor-

risville art critics, but she believed in vivid tones and plenty of them.

"Blake is so mild," fretted Linda, as she made ready for bed that night. "He can't assert himself; left alone he would do beautiful sets for us. Some of those vague, washed-in effects he does would be wonderful. But I know Estelle will dictate and our backgrounds will look like Russian murder scenes when the play is a delicate, fairy story."

She determined to hope for the best, but one look at Blake's face when she met him after school the next day, confirmed her fears.

"I say——" Blake waved his hands helplessly when he talked and his nice straightforward blue eyes seemed to be always asking you to have patience while he unfolded his complicated ideas.

"You know Estelle Carr is on my committee," began Blake, taking a fresh start.

Then he stopped again.

They were in a deserted classroom, but Linda had no means of knowing how long they might remain undisturbed. It was clear that she would have to help the chairman of the scenery committee, if they were to get anywhere that afternoon.

"Edith Groves told me you had Estelle on your committee," said Linda helpfully. "I sup-

pose she has turned in some sketches. Is that it?"

"Red," Blake confided in the same tone of voice in which he might have said, "the corpse is hidden in the gutter."

"Red and black, with touches of gold, and don't ask me what it represents, for the scene calls for a garden in the first act, and the second act is laid in a grove of white birch trees," he mourned.

"Let me see those sketches," said Linda firmly.

Blake produced them. Linda had no clearer idea than he what they were meant to be, but the predominating colors were red and gold and black and a splash or two of orange and vivid blue.

"That's Russian," Linda declared firmly. "I saw a play once where they all died, and the scenes were done in red and orange with just enough blue to give you a headache."

"I can't tell her her stuff is no good—she's a girl," said Blake mournfully.

"You are the chairman and it is up to you," Linda told him. "You made a fatal mistake in asking her to submit sketches."

Something in his face apprised her of the truth.

"You didn't ask!" she cried, "Estelle didn't wait to be asked."

"Well, she brought these around to the house last night," confessed Blake. "I said I'd look them over."

Linda thought for a moment.

"How many are there on your committee?" she asked pensively.

"Five altogether—no, six," said Blake. "It seemed only fair to have an equal number of girls and fellows. Besides Estelle, there are Grace Hunter and Agnes Moffatt, and Jimmie Andrews and Charlie Hunter."

"Jimmie Andrews hasn't much time to serve, has he?" Linda asked absently.

"No, but he's a darn nice fellow," said Blake warmly, "and I think it's kind of shabby to leave him off things, just because he has to work. He made a fuss when I told him he was on my committee, but I told him I'd rather have his opinion than anyone else's I know. I would, too. Jimmie is no artist, but he's honest and he doesn't mind telling you a drop looks punk, where some one else might try to save your feelings."

"Then appoint him critic!" Linda cried in delight. "Jimmie simply will not beat around the bush and he'll be perfectly willing to tell Estelle that her sketches are not suitable. And for pity's sake, Blake, don't ask for suggestions—plan out what you're going to do and set your

committee at the actual painting. You're the artist, that is why you're chairman; Jimmie will fend off impossible ideas and you turn us out something that will make the town sit up and take notice."

Blake, considerably cheered, promised to do his best. Linda left him sketching rapidly, Estelle's red and orange contributions hidden safely in their envelope, while she hurried away to attend a meeting of the business committee.

"You and I will get writer's cramp before we are through signing vouchers," Fred Vaney greeted her. "I wish you'd look over this estimate for printing the tickets, it seems high."

Fred had four on his committee, including himself, and only one of these was a girl. This was Helen Ware, a friend of Linda's and who later confided that she believed she owed her appointment solely to the fact that she had a typewriter given to her on her last birthday. Fred thought it more business-like to make out bills and write letters on the "machine."

"Have you any idea how many tickets we can count on selling?" asked Linda, eyeing the printer's bill which in truth did seem to ask for a great deal of cash.

"Counting the balcony, we can seat 200," said

Fred, "and if we charge more than seventy-five cents, no one will come. Morrisville is conservative."

Linda looked up from the inky slip of paper.

"Let's do it on a larger scale," she suggested coolly.

CHAPTER VIII

SECOND REHEARSAL

"WHY NOT," Linda went on, as they stared at her dumbly, "why not rent the town hall and give a really finished performance?"

"'Finished' is the word you want, all right," said Fred grimly, finding his voice at last. "Do you know they'll want fifty dollars the first thing for the hall, and we don't know that we can fill it."

"Yes, that would be our finish—I can see it," spoke up Mason Hurlbut, another member of the committee.

"Why don't you look on the bright side?" Linda argued. "The hall will seat at least 350 and that's 150 more than you can crowd into the school auditorium. How much will 150 seats, at seventy-five cents apiece, come to?"

"If we sell the tickets, it comes to $112.50," reported the cautious Fred, after a few moments of figuring.

"Well, then——" Linda was triumphant, "after paying $50 for the hall, we'd still have

$62.50 left, extra, to say nothing of the other seats."

"There's the cost of the coach to come out of our profits," Fred reminded her gloomily, "and all the other expenses."

"Just what I am trying to point out," said Linda, while Helen, to whom any discussion of figures was so much Greek, gazed at her in awed admiration.

"Those extra 150 seats will account for a good slice of the expenses. And, if we sell enough tickets, not only will we clear up all possible bills, but we'll have more left over to buy the class present than if we rubbed along trying to make the school auditorium 'do.'"

"They'll charge you $10 for every rehearsal. The janitor won't open up and turn on the lights for less," Fred declared.

"We don't want to rehearse there," countered Linda promptly. "Our auditorium is plenty good enough for that. We might have one dress rehearsal, the night before the play, to give the cast a chance to become familiar with the exits and entrances and the stage, but the rest of the time we can get along with our own equipment."

In the end, she convinced Fred and Mason and Dave Bowman, the three masculine members of the committee. Helen, of course, had been with Linda from the start.

"Only you'll have to see Mr. Watts," was Fred's parting word. "He is to audit the accounts, anyway, and besides he may not like us to go outside the school."

Linda promised to see Mr. Watts. He was the principal and she had no intention of switching the class play from the school auditorium to the Morrisville town hall, without the approval of the powers that were.

Mr. Watts, duly consulted, had no objections if Linda thought that the increased financial obligations could be met.

"Morrisville is a small place, and you must know the limitations of your audience, numerically, from a study of previous years and plays," he said gravely. "I should not like the graduating class to go into debt. You have the reputation of the school to consider, you know."

There was a great deal more he had to say and Linda wondered frantically if she was the only one connected with "The Rose Jar" who could think of it light-heartedly and as a pleasure to come. Even Edith Groves was afraid she might fail in her part and Fred Vaney and Mr. Watts apparently were weighed down by a multitude of cares.

However, when she left the office, it was settled that the play was to be given in the town

hall. Linda thought that the news Jimmie Andrews brought from Mr. Farrington, head of the town council which controlled the renting of the hall, that, in consideration of the aims of the players and the state of the class exchequer, the hall would be rented them for the very special price of $35, might lighten the general gloom. But Mason Hurlbut's comment was that, "thank goodness, they'd be fifteen dollars less in the hole" and Fred grunted and remarked that perhaps they made the reduction in the hope of getting cash in advance and so making sure of *something*.

"Little rays of sunshine," said Linda bitterly, meeting Jimmie Andrews as she came home from a meeting of the music committee, torn, at their first assembly, by a difference of opinion on the part of those who wanted "music between the acts" and those who thought a sweet silence would be appreciated by the audience and certainly by the players.

Jimmie grinned and reminded her that the second general rehearsal was called for the next afternoon.

"Don't take it too seriously, and you can have a heap of fun," he advised her. "You can't have an ambitious production without arousing the dormant ambitions of those who are to take part. And there is nothing more powerful than a

dormant ambition once put in motion," he added.

"I know it," Linda said fervently. "If I have never appreciated the excellent qualities of nice little wall-flowery characters who are content to stay in the background, I do now. There are no wall flowers in the grammar school, or if there are, I have not met them."

"Beware how you nip ambition in the bud," warned Jimmie. "A thwarted ambition is likely to turn into a skyrocket and go off at the wrong moment wrecking the scenery."

Linda nodded. She sensed the mixture of seriousness and fun under his bantering, and she resolved to treat all ambitions as kindly as possible. When it came to that, she wasn't the least ambitious mortal in the world she reminded herself honestly.

Miss Haverstraw, the competent, was already on the platform, when they entered the auditorium the next afternoon. All parts, the coach announced, were to be read, since the players had not had time in which to commit their speeches to memory.

"But next Tuesday, I'll expect you to do with prompting," she said, "and we'll collect the parts as soon as you come in, so don't trust to luck to help you through."

Miss Haverstraw rather encouraged an audience as she thought it gave her actors confidence.

So the committee members and as many of the school as could stay which meant practically the entire roll, dropped into the auditorium seats and watched as the first act got under way.

"Until we get our properties together, this umbrella stand will have to do for the rose jar," said the coach, dragging forward a hideously ornate china umbrella stand which from time immemorial had stood outside the door of the principal's office.

"But we need the bumblebee," said Edith Groves.

"Of course we'll have to use a doll unless I can persuade some one to loan us a baby for the one night," Miss Haverstraw returned. "Well, until we get the doll, or the baby, a sofa cushion is a good substitute."

She dispatched one of the younger children to the teachers' room for a gay chintz-covered sofa pillow and this, rolled up and stuffed into the umbrella stand, was the enchanted child who seemed to be a bumblebee when enemies approached, or a rose, when friends came near.

"As a matter of fact it looks like a sausage," admitted Miss Haverstraw, when she had the pillow adjusted to her satisfaction. "Never mind, we can not be too practical, especially as we're working on a fairy play."

The rehearsal proceeded smoothly and, when the chorus swung into the first song, everyone listened in flattering surprise. The music was lovely and there was a haunting rhythm to it that set feet tapping the floor and made the boys whistle it the next morning, long after, so they thought, it had been forgotten or put out of mind.

"It's going to be lovely!" declared Helen Ware, humming the "Lily Pad" song as Fred Vaney stuffed her coat pockets full of memoranda which he wished her to copy on the useful typewriter.

"I'd give anything if I could sing," another girl mourned.

"As Miss Bascom would say, be thankful you're not deaf," Helen reminded her. "If you were deaf, you couldn't even hear them sing."

Leah Masters admitted this to be true. Any further regrets she might haave mentioned were promptly forgotten as a loud wail of anguish filled the air.

"Ow! ow!" some child was screaming. "You stuck me—ow!"

Then——

"Linda! I told you I didn't like Janice Adams, and now she's gone and stuck a pin in me!"

David sped across the stage closely pursued

by the outraged Janice and the older boys saw the opportunity to relieve the tedium of waiting.

"Go it, Dave!" they shouted. "You can win —duck—duck, boy; here's the stairs, over here."

David nimbly dodged round a chair, stumbled down the short flight of steps that led from the platform and fled blindly down the auditorium, boys and girls falling back to give him passage-way. After him resolutely galloped Janice, her face crimson with anger and exertion.

Linda was talking to Blake Marsh, but she heard David. She came to meet him now and put an arm around him.

"Hush, lamb, hush," she admonished gently. "Why, David, it isn't like you to make a fuss—you're not hurt."

"She stuck a pin in me!" insisted David.

"Of all the disagreeable children I ever met, he's the worst!" Janice panted, having caught up with the pursued at last.

"He's ruined the pattern I had for the elves' suits," went on Janice crossly. "He wouldn't stand still one minute, and if a pin stuck in him it's his own fault, because he kept twisting like an eel."

"I don't want you to make my suit," David informed her crisply.

"You mustn't talk like that," said Linda, who could speak crisply herself when she chose.

"What did I tell you about being an elf?"

Poor David was an honest child and a literal one.

"Must I have pins stuck in me?" he demanded pathetically.

"I'm sure I don't care whether you have a suit or not," said Janice. "But you can't be in the play without one. It's bad enough to have all my plans spoiled by ugly green stuff, without having to deal with temperamental children in the bargain."

Linda flushed. Then Janice must have decided to yield and buy the green material instead of the blue, but this was going to be a dear victory if she insisted on being a martyr as recompense.

"David will have more patience another time," said Linda sensibly. "Or if you don't want to fit him again, Janice, Aunt Carol will help with his suit. She would love to help you any time you find it convenient."

This was, as Linda hoped it might be, a most diplomatic speech. Janice could design costumes as far as the water color sketches went, but when it came to cutting patterns or fitting the cut pieces together, she usually experienced some trouble. To have Miss Gilly's clever needle as her ally would be a wonderful boon. And if she was willing to help the chairman of the

costume committee, that must mean that she did not intend to dictate.

"If she will make David's suit, I'll be glad," said Janice, rather ungraciously, but she was thankful in her heart.

So the rehearsal closed on what Edith Groves called "an amiable high note." Linda coming home alone after her walk to the station with Miss Haverstraw was startled to see Independence circling around a bundle of clothes on the front lawn. He was barking wildly.

CHAPTER IX

MISS PATIENCE GREENE

"The laundryman has dropped the wet wash," said the sensible Linda, leaping to a sensible conclusion.

But sensible conclusions are not always correct. When she reached the bundle, Linda was astonished to find that it was not clothes. It was composed of one small and extremely active girl and one small and equally active boy. The latter Linda recognized at a glance.

"David—what in the world!" she gasped, blissfully unaware of her resemblance at that moment to Mrs. Hampton.

"Get up," said Linda, taking a firm hold on a blue galatea blouse sleeve. "Get up this minute, aren't you ashamed to be fighting a girl?"

"She was fighting me," David mumbled, apparently glad to be hauled to his feet.

The lawn was soft and muddy from the spring rains and David looked as though he might have been playing football. But the sturdy little figure that bounced to its feet and stood scowl-

ing at Linda, looked as though the entire football team might have gone over it.

Linda saw first a magnificent mop of the reddest hair that ever grew on a human head. Then two eyes so dark that she never guessed they were blue. A splash of golden freckles over a plain, rather pathetic little face. And a plaid gingham frock that was much too large even for the plump little body.

"Why, she's a baby!" thought Linda swiftly. "She can't be a day over four years old. I—my goodness, can she be Patty?"

Well, she was. Miss Gilly explained her arrival as soon as Linda and the children entered the kitchen. Miss Gilly was looking over Patty's meager wardrobe and Grandma Poore was taking the baked apples out of the oven.

"Miss Jackson is going on her monthly trip up-state," said Miss Gilly, "and won't be back for a week. She said she couldn't bear to leave Patty so long and this afternoon she telephoned to ask me if she might bring her out."

"David," said Linda looking straight at the culprit, "hasn't been very hospitable. I found them fighting on the lawn."

Grandma Poore laughed. Her cousin, Ann Royal had often remarked that Emily Poore was no help at all when it came to bringing up children.

"I punched him," said Patty sweetly, "because he wouldn't let me have the dog for mine."

"I *told* her Independence is your dog," the aggrieved David said to Linda.

"He is," declared Linda. "I couldn't give him to you, Patty, because no one gives her dog away. I'd as soon think of giving away my chain of gold beads. But I will lend you Independence, if you like. When I'm in school he'll be glad to be your dog if you are kind to him."

"Well, that will be all right," agreed Patty composedly. "I don't care so much if he isn't my dog as long as he isn't that boy's dog."

This was a charming disposition, Linda reflected, and while David, with Grandma Poore's help, was getting into a clean blouse, Linda Lane scrubbed Patty, who in turn studied the fittings of the new bathroom respectfully, and wondered what kind of a mind was hidden in that well-shaped little head.

Patty, her last name, she informed Linda, was Greene, was not a pretty child, though good looks might come later. Her face was still delightfully round and chubby, but her features were undeniably plain. Her distinguishing note was her hair. Linda had never seen such hair. To be sure it was perfectly straight, but it was so heavy, and it hung to

the child's waist. Linda wondered how it had escaped the ruthless shears of Mrs. Quincy. The matron did not take kindly to anything that imposed extra work and short "bobs" were the rule for all the children under her care. Probably the answer was that Patty's hair was so splendidly healthy and its shining order was so natural, that no extra care had been needed to keep the red locks tidily braided. Linda brushed out the wonderful mane now and braided it in two braids. She had no hair ribbons, for her own hair was bobbed, but an appeal to Miss Gilly brought out a length of blue ribbon which, cut in two, answered nicely.

In Patty's suit case they found a clean, if faded frock and this was put on that restless young person. Linda knew that Miss Gilly was planning a new dress for the child every time she looked at her. "Running up" a new dress was a task Miss Gilly dearly loved.

"You look sweet enough to kiss," said Linda, when Patty was ready for supper.

The little girl flung her arms around her and kissed her warmly, but the next minute she had charged on David and tipped over the checkerboard with which he was sedately amusing himself.

"If this comes from having red hair——" thought Linda in some alarm.

Aloud she said, "Patty, pick up every one of those checkers and give them to David."

Patty tilted her chin impishly.

"We have whipped cream on the baked apples to-night," said Linda conversationally. "If you want yours without cream, leave the checkers alone."

Just by chance Patty happened to look through the door of the dining room, where the checker episode had taken place, into the kitchen. Miss Gilly was pouring the loveliest yellow bowl of stiffly whipped cream into another bowl, one of pink and white china to go on the table. It was unthinkable that she should have to sit at the table and see the others eating that delicious mound of snowy whiteness and not share it with her.

"Oh, all right," surrendered the four-year-old in a tone of infinite weariness.

The checkers went back into the box and supper was a peaceful meal, perhaps because Linda sat between the children.

Grandma Poore took them up to bed at quarter of eight and Linda settled down for an hour's study. It was one of Miss Gilly's few and inflexible rules that all books must be closed when the town whistle blew nine. Usually Linda could study directly after supper, but this evening the two children had bickered incessantly.

She had finally offered to cut paper dolls for Patty and rows of soldiers for David, a plan which had served as a truce.

Linda studied in the pretty living room. The house was now in order and, so everyone said who saw it, most attractively arranged. Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore read and sewed and talked in the dining room until Linda was ready to talk.

This evening concentration did not come readily and she heard Grandma Poore come down stairs and go into the dining room.

"Everything all right?" asked little Miss Gilly.

"Yes, indeed," Grandma answered cheerfully. "I know how children like that Patty are, they fight sleep till the last minute and then, when you do get them into bed, they go to sleep as though you'd blown out a candle. It frightens you unless you are used to it. She's a handful, bubbling over with energy and ready to fight for everything she wants. Now it takes twice as long to get David ready for sleep, for all he's so quiet. He'll lie awake for hours, if anything is troubling him. I try to tell him drowsy stories and get his nerves smoothed out."

Linda read another sentence.

"Isn't it strange we don't hear from Mrs. Lawson?" suggested Miss Gilly. "The letter

hasn't come back. Linda thinks they may be traveling and that their mail is being forwarded to them. She wanted to call up the cousin again, but I didn't see any use in that."

"Still, she might have sent you David's clothes," Grandma Poore declared, rather indignantly. "She must have known you would have to buy him a complete new outfit."

"I didn't mind that," said Miss Gilly, "and she probably thinks that the clothes Mrs. Lawson bought for David do not really belong to him. I don't suppose they do if she isn't going to adopt him."

Linda read two more sentences. Her mind was anywhere but on the printed page before her. She was wondering if, after all, the Morrisville folk were right. Was her plan a crazy scheme and was she dragging gentle Aunt Carol into more work and worry after she had worked and worried for so many years? Would she be happier if she spent her money only on herself, and perhaps Linda, and lived in a larger house and went abroad and wore furs and diamonds?

Unconsciously Miss Gilly herself supplied an answer to that.

"I don't want to disturb Linda," said the little dressmaker—and Linda started a bit guiltily, since she was supposed to be so deeply immersed in algebra review that she *couldn't* be disturbed.

"I thought this afternoon, Emily," went on Miss Gilly, "that it seems like living to have children in the house. Linda is my pride and comfort, but I rather like the idea of having some problems to solve. I'm a little afraid of life when it flows along too easily."

Grandma Poore laughed her rich, comfortable chuckle.

"Patty and David will supply you with problems," she said. "I never saw two children more individual and less alike. You've got a skyrocket and a cannon ball in the house now. But I agree with you, it's children that keeps us alert and happy. I've always wanted grandchildren and here is my wish coming true."

"I must start sewing tomorrow," announced Miss Gilly. "Thank fortune Linda has some frocks to start the summer with, for Patty is practically destitute. Dear Cousin Dorothea—there won't be any more boxes from her, but I have enough material in those she sent year after year, to keep all the women folk in clothes for several years."

"Linda said you are going to sew for a few customers still," Grandma Poore observed. "I thought you'd given that up."

"They wouldn't give me up," explained Miss Gilly ruefully. "I don't think there are more than eight or nine all told, but they're the women

who are stout and hard to fit, or who dread shopping for ready-made clothes, or who, like Mrs. Evans, dread to make a change. I'll be glad to keep my hand in, too, though Linda was disappointed at first. She wanted me to make a grand gesture and announce to the world at large that Carol Gilly would sew no more."

Linda smiled over her algebra. She had wanted just that. But little Miss Gilly wisely pointed out that she liked to sew, she was as devoted to her needle as Linda was to her various interests. She *wanted* to sew for these few old friends who had known her for years and for whom she had made dozens of dresses.

"I don't believe the town knows everything," thought Linda now. "Aunt Carol does like the children even if they are going to complicate matters. I begin to understand why Patty was building up a reputation like mine; she wouldn't get along a bit better than I did with Mrs. Quincy."

But Linda remembered vividly her own trials and her own hunger for love and demonstration. She remembered vividly, too, how she would rather have died than admit that she wanted people to love her. So when, early the next morning she woke to find Patty standing stolidly by her bed, though the child made no move or

gave her any greeting, Linda put out her arm and drew her close.

"Good morning, sweetheart," she said with a kiss. "I'm so glad you are here."

Something flickered in the dark blue eyes. Then Patty did care.

"Linda, can I go to school?" she demanded.

"Why—I don't know," temporized Linda. "How old are you?"

"Four," Patty said promptly.

"Perhaps they'll take you in the kindergarten, but you'll have to be as good as gold," said Linda, using her favorite simile.

"I'm going to be an elf, too," Patty declared confidently, snuggling more closely against Linda.

"Oh, goodness," thought Linda, a trifle wildly. "David has told her about the elves. And we can't use another one. I wonder is she the kind of child who makes a great fuss when she can't have what she wants?"

The sunlight fell across the white bed and struck Patty's flaming hair.

"Something tells me she makes a fuss," Linda mused whimsically.

CHAPTER X

JIMMIE MAKES A SUGGESTION

Aloud she declared that unless they both dressed quickly, David would arrive downstairs first, and he might—he might—happen to eat up all the breakfast. Patty took this hint and proceeded to make her toilet expeditiously and deftly. No one had ever waited on her and she didn't expect help, though Linda did insist on brushing the shining hair and braiding it smoothly.

David was out in the yard, ready to help Linda feed the chickens and this, to Patty, was a new and delightful experience. She asked a thousand questions about the biddies and had to be torn almost bodily from the henhouse, an egg clutched tightly in each chubby hand.

As they went toward the house, familiar voices hailed them.

"Hello, Linda!"

"Who's that, Linda?"

Linda grinned companionably. She had

For answer Patty hurled both her eggs straight at David.

been expecting Buddy and Lucy to put in an appearance.

"This is Patty Greene," she announced, "and Patty, here are Buddy and Lucy Hampton, who live next door to you. They go to kindergarten, too."

"Are they elves?" asked Patty, staring calmly at the strangers.

Linda had to admit that Buddy and Lucy were elves.

"You won't be," David informed Patty. "They don't need any more. I heard Miss Haverstraw say so."

For answer Patty hurled both her eggs straight at David, and her aim was deadly. One struck him on the chest, spattering his clean blouse and the other landed on his knee and dripped down over his sock and shoe.

"Oh-h!" breathed the shocked Lucy. "What a bad girl you are!"

Linda hustled her charge into the house, conquering with difficulty a strong desire to spank the little spitfire who seemed pleased with the result of her performance.

"You sit down and eat your breakfast, Linda," said Grandma Poore quietly, when she saw Linda's flushed face. "I'll get the children into clean clothes. You must remember

you have your school work to 'tend to. Don't have the universe on your shoulders all at once."

Miss Gilly drowned Linda's cereal in cream and looked at her a little anxiously as she put the bowl before her.

"Linda," she said in a low voice, "do you think Patty is going to be too much for us?"

Linda did not hesitate.

"No indeed, Aunt Carol," she said quickly. "The first week is the hardest, I remember how it used to be. And"—she giggled her infectious giggle—"while it is easy to see that Patty was too much for Mrs. Quincy and why, we ought to discover what Miss Bascom calls 'the unplumbed depths' in her."

The unplumbed depths in Patty, Linda was about ready to admit at the end of the first week, were deep—deep and filled with cross-currents. Patty, entered in the kindergarten, was sent home the first day for knocking over a gentle little girl who disputed with her the possession of a ball. The second day, Linda had to go down and soothe Patty, who was hysterical from some never-explained fear. David had to be placed across the room from her, for they quarreled on the smallest provocation or none at all. And yet the kindergarten teacher liked Patty. She said she was lively and

energetic and a positive asset when they played outdoor games.

Linda often wondered what would have happened if the question of Patty as an elf had not been settled almost providentially. At the second rehearsal, one of the youngest children announced that she was going to California with her mother and father the next week and would not, therefore, be available as an elf. Immediately a clamor arose and engulfed Linda. The entire infant population of Morrisville, at least that part of it registered in the public school, desired, so it wailed and begged and pleaded, to be an elf.

"You'll have to get somebody who can wear Marian's suit," said Janice Adams to Linda. "We've got all the suits cut and there isn't a scrap of material left over. If you say so, I'll try the suit on the children and the one it fits best ought to have the part."

This suited Linda exactly. It was a fair method of making the selection and no charge of favoritism could be brought against her. The hopeful candidates were caught and taken into one of the classrooms and Janice began to fit the suit.

"It's like Cinderella and the glass slipper, isn't it?" said Helen Ware interestedly.

"Except that it isn't a slipper and that Janice

isn't a prince and there is no Cinderella," Agnes Moffat retorted.

Oddly enough, and at first to Linda's dismay, the suit was pronounced to be almost a per fect fit for the chubby Patty. The California-journeying Marian had also been a plump child and it was noticeable that more material had been needed to cut her suit than for any of the others. Janice, thrifty by nature, was really pleased that no alterations would be necessary and not even a basting thread needed to be changed.

But Linda was not above wondering what people "would say."

"Why do you care?" said Jimmie Andrews, when she mentioned this to him. "Everyone knows you didn't make the choice. It isn't up to you."

"But Patty lives with us and it looks as though I were pushing her in," Linda urged.

"Bosh!" was Jimmie's answer. "You know you're not pushing her in and that is all that counts. I hope you're not one of these people who regulate their lives to conform to outsiders' opinions."

"No-o, I don't think I am," admitted Linda. "To tell you the truth, Jimmie, I'm so thankful that Patty is to be an elf, I'm half afraid it isn't true. If you argue with

me a little, it will make it seem more real."

Jimmie glanced at her shrewdly.

"I guess that redhead is easier to live with, if she has what she wants," he surmised. "She's a nice kid, but she wants things and she wants 'em quick. How do she and David hit it off together?"

"Like a nice little cat and dog," said Linda frankly. "I never, in all my life, saw two children who could quarrel and bicker as they do. Yet you can't say they dislike each other and Patty is certainly teaching David to talk. He used to be so silent he worried me, but now her tongue stirs him up and one or the other is missing from the table half the time."

Jimmie laughed, a reminiscent gleam in his eye.

"I used to be sent away from the table, too," he confided. "Funny how you remember things, isn't it? and—good grief, I almost forgot what I came over especially to ask you."

It was after supper and the warmest night a rather fickle April had as yet vouchsafed them. Jimmie had found Linda working in a flower bed on the side lawn and for once without a circle of children around her. They had, so she informed him, gone uptown with Grandma Poore to mail a letter, "they" including Buddy and Lucy who liked the family next door and made no secret of their affection. After all,

they needed a grandma in their lives as much as Patty and David and Grandma Poore quite frankly saw lovely qualities in every child. It was no wonder that they all followed her as bees do honey.

"You don't happen to want—to want—I mean I thought perhaps you needed," stumbled Jimmie, while Linda stared at him in surprise.

"I suppose I'm going at this the wrong way," he went on, "but what I meant to ask you, Linda, was whether you think there is room in your plan for a big sister."

Linda's eyes sparkled.

"I'd *love* a big sister!" she declared with enthusiasm. "Oh, Jimmie, do you know of one?"

"You'll be disappointed I can tell," said Jimmie soberly. "What is your idea of a big sister, Linda?—I'd kind of like to know," he added, using the idiom he unconsciously picked up as he delivered orders through the country which lay behind Morrisville.

Linda put aside her trowel and sat down comfortably on the grass, her hands clasped in her lap.

"I've dreamed of a big sister for years and years," she declared. "I'd like her to be about three years older than I am, then she would be seventeen. And I would like her to be pretty and gay and to love me very much. We could

go to places together and sleep together and have secrets. And, as soon as I get in high school, she would tell me the things I didn't get the first time, algebra especially. She would know all the teachers and—oh, she'd help me over the hard spots. And no matter what happened, we would always have each other and love each other dearly. I could be her maid of honor, too, when she was married," added Linda blissfully.

Jimmie Andrews laughed at that, but he grew grave quickly.

"Linda, I suppose in a way I ought not to mention this to you," he said slowly. "You and Miss Gilly are already doing more than your share to make this old world spin in the right direction. But there's a girl——" he paused.

"Yes?" Linda prompted him softly, "yes, Jimmie. Go on."

"She lives on one of the back roads, about ten miles out," obediently went on Jimmie. "Her name is Mary Rice and she is everything your ideal sister is not—except her age. She must be sixteen or seventeen. But she is thin and homely and not any too friendly. She isn't gay—far from it. I'd call her a gloom, but I guess she has enough to make her gloomy. The one gift she has, that I've been able to discover,

is her mind. Gee, Linda, that girl is a perfect shark when it comes to school stuff. She eats books. She wants to be a teacher and she's in in second year high now. She would be higher, but she has lost a lot of time because she has to drop out and help her folks at home. I take groceries there every other week and sometimes she talks to me and asks me if I ever knew anyone who was a teacher and how much money it costs."

Linda was puzzled, but she waited patiently.

"Last week she told me that unless she can earn something, she'll have to give up school and go to work in a cannery or some factory," said Jimmie. "I think it's too bad for a girl who is so wild about teaching to be shut out of it. I thought maybe she could help Miss Gilly or take care of the children, and go to school from here."

"Aunt Carol was saying that we ought to have someone to help us," Linda admitted, mechanically. "She thinks Grandma Poore does too much housework and Aunt Carol is sewing again and can't help much. And this school play takes an awful lot of my time. Some one to stay with Patty and David *would* be a relief, Jimmie."

"You know it's a rotten thing to say, but I don't want you to get the wrong idea, Mary Rice isn't pretty—she isn't the laughing kind.

You always seem to see the funny side of things, but she doesn't. Maybe you won't be able to stand having her around," and Jimmie looked at Linda anxiously.

"You'd better say she may not be able to tand me or Patty and David," said Linda lightly. "I think she sounds like a girl who needs a family —just as I did. Are her father and mother nice to her, Jimmie?"

"Her mother scolds a good deal," Jimmie confessed, "but there are seven kids around all the time and I guess she has to lay down the law. Mary's father is dead. They run a little farm and Mary says if she could fix it so she wasn't any expense to her mother, she could stick out the next two years in school. When she goes to normal, she can work her way through doing housework, she thinks."

"I'll speak to Aunt Carol to-night," decided Linda. "And I'll let you know just as soon as I can, Jimmie."

"I could take you out there in the grocery wagon," Jimmie offered. "Maybe you'd like to see her first."

"And she could see me," said Linda thoughtfully.

"Well, she doesn't need to see *you*," Jimmie declared earnestly. "She's the one who will have all the luck."

CHAPTER XI

OVER THE RIDGE

After Jimmie had gone off whistling, he privately was sure that Linda could "fix" anything and that a situation, left in her hands, was bound to flower according to directions, Linda decided that she had had enough gardening. She wanted to think.

It was an unusual luxury to have a little time to herself. She sat down on the steps of the back porch and Independence came and curled up close beside her. He had the loveliest of dog dispositions, but lately he had had a little too much attention. Independence was far too polite to mention it, but he could have been quite as happy if the four children, for the Hamptons were never far away, had neglected him or pointedly ignored him. As it was, he was sometimes forced to go and hide in the cellar or go off to a kindly neighbor who had no small children, or failing these retreats, to sneak under the kitchen table where kind Grandma Poore respected his need for rest and seclusion.

To-night, Linda was wondering about Mary —Mary Rice. It wasn't a musical name and the picture Jimmie had given her did not sound attractive, either. Linda had her dream big-sister so carefully drawn, that not a detail was lacking. She would love Linda with a protective devotion that the younger girl, in spite of her passion for independence and her flair for leadership, craved. Linda had moments when she thought that to be taken care of, instead of having to always look out for younger children, must be delightful.

"I thought her name would be Muriel, perhaps," thought Linda disconsolately. "And of course I wanted her pretty and gay, as I told Jimmie. She would teach me to dance and we'd have wonderful times together. And Mary sounds melancholy, she actually does."

There was the question of a room, too. The new bedrooms were already occupied by Patty and David. Linda had her own pretty room, Grandma Poore and Miss Gilly each sleeping alone, too. If Mary came, she would have to share Linda's room there was no other place to put her.

"I wanted Muriel to sleep with me," murmured Linda, rising as she saw Grandma Poore coming down the street at the head of her procession.

When the children were safely in bed half an hour later and Miss Gilly had returned from a neighborhood call, Linda told them about Mary Rice.

"Why, I don't know," hesitated Miss Gilly. "We do need some one to help us, Grandma does far too much——"

"No such thing," Grandma Poore disputed firmly. "I never was happier in my life."

"Well, you could be just as happy, if you had some one you could send to the store," pointed out Miss Gilly. "The automobile traffic is so heavy this spring I'm afraid to have either of the children go. And Linda certainly has all she can do."

"I won't be so busy when the play is over," said Linda, "but since I am in it, I do feel I ought to keep everlastingly at it, the more so since hiring the town hall was my idea. If Mary Rice can look after Patty and David, days when I don't get home till supper time, I think she will be a big help. I did want a big sister, one to fit into the family. Jimmie says Mary is kind of gloomy and of course she won't want to be adopted. She wants to earn a little money to give her mother, and then, if her living expenses are taken care of, she thinks she can finish high school and go to Normal."

"But where will she sleep?" Miss Gilly asked doubtfully.

"We'll have to share a room," said Linda. "Maybe it will be a little hard just at first to get used to each other, but we can do it. And my room is nice and large, so we'll be comfortable."

They talked a little more and it was decided that the next Saturday morning Linda should drive out with Jimmie and see Mary Rice. When it came right down to the question, both Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore depended on Linda to give the final answer. If Linda thought Mary should come and live with them, Miss Gilly and Grandma were ready to welcome the girl. There was a room in their hospitable hearts for all children, little and big, who needed a home and affection.

It was with some difficulty Linda made it clear to Patty and David and Buddy and Lucy, when the eventful day came round, that she was going with Jimmie and that the grocery orders would take up all available space in the rear of the wagon. No matter, said Linda, how strongly Jimmie might desire four nice children in the back of his wagon, there was simply no place to put them.

"Remember the elves!" cried Linda warningly

as she drove away with Jimmie in the rattling rig.

Jimmie was counting the time till he would be seventeen and old enough for a driver's license, when he would be allowed to drive one of the delivery cars. Mr. Farrington, the grocer, had promised him a route to himself and Jimmie was confident that fame and fortune waited him in the retail grocery trade. Meanwhile he drove over the bad back roads in the ramshackle old wagon, harnessed to the patient Timothy, and made friends wherever he went through his courtesy, carefulness and willingness to take pains.

"I wish I could take you in the car," apologized Jimmie, turning off on Main Street as soon as he could.

"I'm very fond of Timothy," Linda assured him, "and if you could have heard the children trying to bribe me to smuggle them in the back with the oil cans and crackers, you would be flattered."

Jimmie laughed and asked her what she had meant when she told them to "remember the elves."

"That is no idle threat," explained Linda. "You know how keen the competition is among the youngsters to be an elf. I tell the children if they are not as good as gold, they'll have to

give up their places to more tractable children."

"What I like about you," Jimmie informed her, "is the way you handle those kids. I'd lose my temper forty times a day and read the riot act to them, but you just keep still and get them to do your way without flying off the handle."

"You ought to see me sometimes," said Linda. "But Jimmie does Mary get angry easily? Would you call her patient?"

It was a question Miss Gilly had raised the evening before. Some one with patience was essential, she had said. Patty had all the temper one small house could hold and David, with his silent spells, would try anyone who was not in the habit of controlling her nerves.

"I don't know whether you'd call her patient or not," Jimmie answered Linda slowly. "You see, all I know of her is what I've seen times I've driven up with the groceries. I never saw her angry or heard her say a mean word to one of the children, and yet I never saw her kiss one, either, or act as if she liked to have them around. I don't believe she loves them overly much."

Linda, though, was wiser than this.

"I imagine she loves them, but she doesn't belong to the kind of family that shows its love," said Linda. "I know plenty of people who

never kiss their children unless they're going to Europe, or away for the summer—or——"

"Or think they're going to die soon," supplemented Jimmie with a smile. "All right, come to think of it, I know people like that, too. I'd rather belong to the kind where your mother—your mother——" he seemed to be getting into deep water and Linda came to his rescue.

"I know what you mean," she said gently. "I know your mother, too, Jimmie. She acts as though it were natural to put her arm around your shoulders when you're standing near each other and she says 'dear' as easily as she says your name. I often think that is what makes Edith Groves such a darling girl. She has three brothers, you know, and they go up to her and kiss her just as they do their mother. Some brothers and sisters *never* show that they love each other and I think it's a shame."

"Well, the Rice family may do it with deeds, but I guess they're short on the words," declared Jimmie.

"That won't matter so much," Linda decided. "I think sometimes the people who say the least really care most. Anyway, Mary will find plenty to criticize in me and here I sit picking her to pieces."

"I wish she was a little more——" began

Jimmie, but Timothy shied at a passing car just then and distracted his attention.

Timothy was seventeen and quite old enough to know the futility of shying at anything, but as Jimmie said he "made gestures."

There were groceries to be delivered at two houses, before they came to the Rice farm. Linda stayed quietly in the wagon and held the reins, while Jimmie carried in the boxes and left the packages on the kitchen table. He had once told Linda that sometimes he forgot there was any other kind of a table in the world beyond the plain pine table used in nearly every kitchen.

Linda had been over these back roads before, walking with the members of the hiking club she had organized, and she was familiar with the drab, weather-beaten little houses which stood forlornly, each apparently built in the most exposed spot the builder could find. Sometimes a bevy of children would be playing near the doorstep and invariably these scattered at the approach of a stranger. Now, as Jimmie went into one of the shabbiest houses, the shade in the front room was cautiously raised an inch and Linda knew she was being inspected.

"Of course the children in a family like that will grow up to be queer," thought Linda, gently shaking the reins to remove an inquisi-

tive fly from Timothy's patiently twitching back.

"It's a good thing David didn't have to grow up in that old cabin with only his grandfather for company," her thoughts ran on. "He is shy enough as it is, but if he had stayed there, he would run the moment anyone came near him."

She was smiling when Jimmie came out and he asked what the joke might be.

"It isn't a joke," Linda answered gayly, "I was only thinking about David and that if he had stayed in that crazy cabin a few years longer, he would be as queer as these children who live way out here. He would run if he saw anyone coming: but Patty, no matter where *she* lived, would be more likely to pick up a brick."

Jimmie grinned.

"She certainly is a Hottentot, isn't she?" he said appreciatively. "But I like 'em spunky, and there is something mighty square about her. She fights, but she's an honest battler."

"Yes, I think she is," agreed the smiling Linda. "Who is this coming down the road, Jimmie?"

Jimmie knew practically everyone who lived "over the Ridge" as the section they were covering this morning, was called. He took a

careful squint at the slender figure in blue overalls and identified it easily.

"One of the Rice kids," said Jimmie. "Ned, I think. Yes, it is. He must be going to work somewhere."

Ned Rice passed Timothy's nose without bowing and he would have ignored Linda and Jimmie as completely, if the latter had not hailed him.

"Hello!" called Jimmie cheerfully, pulling Timothy to a willing halt.

Ned glanced at him indifferently and managed a return "Hello."

"Where you going?" Jimmie challenged.

"Mis' Smith wants her garden made," said Ned, "over to the Corners."

"We're going to see your sister Mary," Jimmie explained. "This is Linda Lane—Linda, this is Mary's brother, Ned Rice. I'll take you over to the Corners, if you can wait fifteen or twenty minutes," he added persuasively.

"Can't wait," said Ned briefly. "Late now."

He trudged on and Jimmie prodded Timothy, who had begun to crop grass at the side of the road.

CHAPTER XII

MARY RICE

The Rice farmhouse was just a shade more dilapidated than any other Linda had seen. The fence was short a few more pickets, the chimney listed a bit more crazily, the weeds, mostly dead and left from the previous season, for even weeds can not gain much headway in April, had trapped a larger collection of dead leaves and trash and refuse, than decorated the other dooryards they had passed.

True, a magnificent wistaria, with a trunk like young tree, spread itself across the front of the unpainted house, but it was too early for the glory of this vine to lend its mantle of beauty to the harsh and unlovely outlines of the sagging building. A few towels flapped forlornly on a wire clothes line.

"Perhaps," said Linda as Jimmie drove up beneath a scraggly and sickly-looking maple tree, which had come up from wind-sown seed and was yearly devoured by caterpillars, "perhaps, Jimmie, you'd better ask Mary to come

out. She might not want a stranger to go into the house."

Jimmie considered this suggestion with the box containing the small order of groceries balanced on his knees.

"I don't know," he finally confessed. "My mother has a fit if folks won't come in; she doesn't even like to go out to the curb and stand and talk, when some one drives up in a car. You don't suppose Mary will have her feelings hurt or anything if you don't go in?"

Linda discovered that this was a question *she* couldn't answer.

"Of course," said Jimmie sensibly, "when you come right down to it you're the one who is doing the favor; you've come to tell Mary how she can earn some money and have a place to live and finish high school. It isn't her place to be touchy. But, in a way, you can't blame her. I guess she has to put up with a lot of condescension from the girls in school. You know high school kids can be snobbish. So when she bites my head off, I never feel like snapping back at her as home is the one place she can speak her mind."

"If she snaps at you, she hasn't any sense," Linda announced warmly. "You have heaps of patience. But I tell you, Jimmie, this is what we'll do. You take in the things and tell her

I'm here and ask her if you shall bring me in, or would she rather come out? That's the simplest way."

Jimmie agreed that it was. He disappeared around the corner of the drab house and a moment later three small children darted out on the other side, stood motionless surveying Linda, then wheeled like startled rabbits and dashed out of sight.

"They'll spread the alarm," giggled Linda, wondering if it would make Timothy sick to eat all the twigs he wanted.

She sat quietly in the wagon, enjoying the sunshine and silence, and trying to picture Mary Rice. Not, she thought whimsically, that she could hope to make her picture anywhere near correct, for like most people Linda seldom found her mental pictures resembled the originals.

Presently she aroused herself to look at her watch. Jimmie had been gone fifteen minutes. Could Mary be "dressing up"? Or wouldn't she come out? Perhaps she had changed her mind and now resented Jimmie's efforts to help her stay in school.

Then she jumped.

"Linda, here is Mary Rice," said Jimmie's voice, at her elbow.

Linda had been looking toward the house.

She turned to find Jimmie and a girl had come up to her on the other side of the wagon.

"I had to go down in the field back of the house, that's what kept me so long," Jimmie explained.

"The turkey hen stole her nest and I was hunting her," said Mary.

Linda's first feeling, as she looked at her, was one of disappointment. She did so admire beauty, and Mary was plain. You couldn't even say she had redeeming features because it wouldn't be true. She hadn't. Patty's marvelous hair would forever give her distinction, but Mary's hair was sandy and not especially thick. She wore it bobbed and combed back plainly. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were sandy, too, and her eyes, behind spectacles, were neither large nor especially well-shaped. Her teeth were white, but her mouth was too large and she was freckled generously. No, Mary wasn't pretty, and worse than that, she seemed to be without charm.

Linda had the gift of directness and she went to the point without delay.

"I rode out with Jimmie this morning," she said in her pleasant, friendly voice, "to see if you would consider coming to stay with us. Jimmie said you wanted to find a family or a place where you could live and still go to school."

"Yes, I do," declared Mary, her eyes clouding with anxiety. "But it's so near the end of the term, I suppose you won't want me to come till fall?"

Linda, till that moment, had never thought of the long vacation. The last three months of the school term, as she saw them ahead of her, were so crowded with plans and details that her program did not go beyond graduation day.

"Why, yes," she said. "We want you very much right away. Patty and David need some one to stay with them. Aunt Carol sews and Grandma takes care of the house and neither one can watch the children all the time. That is really my job——" she smiled at Mary who continued to stare at her seriously, "but I'm managing the play our class is going to give and I expect to just about live at the school."

"I don't suppose the play seems much to you high school folks," said Jimmie tactfully, "but it's stirring up the whole grammar school."

"I heard the girls talking about it," Mary answered. "They say you are going to give it in the town hall. And one of the teachers said if Linda Lane managed the play it couldn't be anything but a success. She said you were the best manager the Grange women ever had."

"Why, I didn't 'manage' that," protested Linda in some confusion. "I just helped with

the children, the way the other girls did. It was fun, too,"

Mary looked at the sparkling face almost wistfully.

"I don't see any fun taking care of children," she stated. "I can do it," she added hastily, "and you needn't be afraid I'll knock them around or anything like that. But if you expect me to sing while I'm looking after them, I might as well tell you at the start that you'll be disappointed."

Linda laughed and Jimmie echoed her.

"But you want to teach," pointed out Linda, a little puzzled.

"Because you can get through Normal in two years and I figure you have a profession and are sure of living wages at the start," Mary said crisply. "I don't expect to like teaching. It isn't necessary to like the work you have to do."

This didn't fit in with Linda's theories at all, but they needn't argue the question.

"Only I would like you to like us," said Linda gently. "Patty has a temper like a skyrocket and David is a darling but most awfully queer. If you can't see their funny ways and the sweet side of them, I'm afraid you will be unhappy and maybe bored."

"If I can go to school—if I can finish high school, I can stand anything," said Mary with

such fervor that her eyes seemed to flame behind the glasses.

"Well, anyway, you'll love Aunt Carol and Grandma, everyone does," Linda assured her. "And we'll have to like each other because we're to share the same room. Do you think you will mind that?"

"I never had a room to myself in my life," declared Mary. "I won't take up much room."

Jimmie had disappeared with the muttered pretext that he had forgotten to get his box, and Linda leaned forward impulsively and kissed the passive Mary.

"Do please come and do please be happy over it," said Linda swiftly.

Mary's sober face did not relax.

"You don't know what it is to be poor and not to have anything to look forward to, except what your own efforts can bring you," she said.

Linda's gray eyes widened, then crinkled with laughter.

"Oh, Mary, don't think I'm light-minded," she begged. "I always act silly in nice spring weather. Maybe I laugh too much, but when you say a thing like that anyone who knows me would have hysterics."

"Why?" asked Mary with evident curiosity.

"I thought everyone in Morrisville knew. Perhaps there are a few girls in the high school

who don't, but they can't be many," Linda said, whose good points did not include always answering the questions put to her.

"I don't have much to do with the girls in high school," said Mary.

"Well, no matter how poor you are, you have never been as poor as I have been," Linda began impressively. "You, at least, have a mother and a home and brothers and sister. We met one of your brothers on the road. I was an orphan and I lived in seven different homes within three years. It was just as hard on the homes as it was on me," she added honestly. "I never could seem to get along with people till I came to live with Aunt Carol."

"Isn't she your real aunt?" demanded Mary.

"No, not really," Linda explained. "Last December, though, she adopted me and now I do belong to her legally. And as soon as she hears from the family who took David, Aunt Carol plans to adopt him and maybe Patty, too. You see she hasn't any family of her own, either."

"But she must be immensely wealthy," commented Mary.

"It's all right to tell you, I think," Linda said, "because you are coming to live with us and anyway, it is known all over Morrisville—when Aunt Carol took me to live with her, she

did dressmaking for a living. Last fall her cousin died and left her a good deal of money and some people think she is foolish to adopt children when she could travel and enjoy herself and spend her income on herself alone."

"I should think that would be what she would want to do," said Mary. "If I had some money of my own, I would go around the world and I wouldn't take a single person with me. It must be luxury to have the things you've wanted all your life, and not to have to take care of anyone but yourself."

"You say that, because you've always been one of a large family," Linda declared wisely. "Aunt Carol knows what living alone really is and so do I. So does Grandma and Grandma Poore had to go out nursing and she had just one room in her cousin's house and the cousin wasn't overly nice to her, either. But now she lives with us and Patty and David call her 'Grandma' and she says she is happier than she has ever been before."

"Well, I'd like to come all right," said Mary, "but as I said before I can't sing and act happy. It isn't in me. I just don't happen to be happy and I won't pretend."

"You needn't," Linda promised, as Jimmie came down the path, the empty box on his shoulder. "You needn't pretend a single thing.

You'll come see Aunt Carol, won't you, and talk it over with her? Then you can meet the children and I'll show you our room. Aunt Carol says we are to have separate beds so that will be nice, and we can get acquainted."

"I'll stop in Monday, after school," said Mary.

She stood back and watched Jimmie turn Timothy around. Timothy had lunched extensively on the poor maple tree, but its outlines were not much worse than they had been before, and Mary smiled faintly as Linda waved her good-by.

"Well?" said Jimmie, urging the horse into a semblance of a trot.

"I like her," was Linda's verdict, "but—O dear!"

CHAPTER XIII

A FULL DAY

"She's nice," Linda repeated that evening when the children were safely in bed and Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore at last were free to hear about Mary Rice.

"She's nice—but she is *not* cheerful. She hates the idea of teaching and yet she is going to be a teacher because she thinks it pays better than anything else at the start."

"What do you suppose she likes to do?" Miss Gilly asked thoughtfully.

"Goodness, I never asked her," said Linda. "Anyway, it wouldn't be much use. I think she is the kind of a girl who, once her mind is made up, never changes it."

"No living person is like that," Miss Gilly protested. "When Mary Rice comes to see me, I mean to find out what she likes to do."

Mary was to come Monday, after school, and as there was a rehearsal of "The Rose Jar," Linda and the children would not be home till nearly five o'clock. Linda thought this an ex-

cellent arrangement, for she wanted Mary to have a quiet talk with gentle Miss Gilly and cheerful Grandma, and a quiet talk was seldom to be counted on if Patty and David were around.

Miss Gilly had made David's suit for him. It was put away for the great occasion, though had David been given his way, he would have worn it each time he practised and would, Miss Gilly pointed out to him, have needed three or four suits before the play was really given.

Edith Groves confided to Linda that she wished Miss Gilly had made her costume too, for Janice was "unbearable."

"I can get along with most any girl," said Edith, which was true, "but Janice goes out of her way to make mean little digs. She and Estelle Carr wouldn't care a little bit if this play failed."

"Yes, they would," Linda asserted stoutly. "Of course they'd care. Janice is having trouble with her committee, because some of the girls promise to sew on a certain afternoon and then go off to the movies, or some place, and don't take a stitch. And she is behind her schedule, too, which makes her cross."

"Why don't you say why she is behind her schedule?" suggested Helen Ware.

"Because this isn't a sewing circle and we're

not going to gossip," Linda retorted, "there goes the opening chorus. Let's go down."

But she knew, as well as Helen did, that Janice had tried again to buy materials for costumes, without first showing the sketches to the stage manager and getting her O.K. The suits for the elves had been settled as Linda dictated, but Janice was determined to have her own way along other lines. Blue was her favorite color and she announced that the enchanted princess must wear blue.

"I don't want to wear blue," said Edith. "The book says the princess is very fond of rose and white. I need a white dress for the first act and a deep rose color for the second."

"I am chairman of the committee and if I take the responsibility, I mean to also use my judgment. Blue is ever so much prettier than rose," Janice announced.

"If you use your sense and read my part," the normally sweet-tempered Edith stormed, "you'd see that all the way through it speaks of the princess' fondness for rose. That is where the rose jar comes in, I lift the lid to look for rose leaves. And the reason I like the prince is because he wears a rose-colored plume in his hat."

"Let him wear a blue one," said Janice.

"I'm not going to Miss Haverstraw," Edith

almost wept, when her sympathetic friends advised her to complain to the coach. "I detest girls who run to the teacher the minute they have a grievance. But I won't wear a blue dress, if I have to go on in my old pink kimono instead!"

However, she did go to her stanch ally, Fred Vaney. Fred was struggling with his accounts, but he listened comprehendingly.

"Don't tell me girls beat the Dutch!" Edith warned him at the close of her recital, "because this isn't a ruction among girls,—it has to do with the extraordinary contrariness of one girl."

"Janice certainly can stir up hornets' nests," commented Fred. "Well, I don't see how she can get Linda's initials on a voucher for blue material if you say the play calls for rose. Linda just about knows this play by heart, all ready."

Janice was too wise to go to Linda. She bought exquisite shimmering blue silk, not an expensive fabric, but most effective, and had it charged to her indulgent father's account. She would, she thought, wait till the play was over, to present that bill. If there was no dress but a blue one for Edith to wear, she would wear blue.

But the Monday rehearsal brought up two points which Janice had not foreseen.

"The Costume Committee is requested to run up some kind of a dress for the leading lady to

wear during rehearsals," said Miss Haverstraw calmly, as the chorus rested on its laurel after the opening song.

"The leading lady," went on the coach, with a smile for Edith, "is not, I am informed, accustomed to wearing a train. And as a train must be worn with ease and grace, if results are not to be disastrous, we must allow her plenty of time in which to make friends with that fashion. I'd suggest that the committee make us a train of some very cheap and sturdy material for the boys will certainly step on it times without number," and Miss Haverstraw joined in the laughter her speech had evoked.

"We're awfully busy and we don't have half enough help," said Janice from her corner of the auditorium, "but I suppose we can take that sateen left over from draping the table where the rose jar is to stand. I'll hang it on a belt and Edith can wear it over her ordinary dress."

"I don't know whether this is the place to make an announcement or not," Fred Vaney said, rising to his feet, "but as it concerns every chairman and I never get you all in one place at one time——" he looked anxiously at the coach.

"Now is an excellent chance to read a lecture or point a moral," declared Miss Haverstraw. "You may do either or both, Fred."

He smiled a little queerly.

"I've been going over the vouchers," he said, and a little ripple of amusement touched his audience.

Fred "lived and ate with his vouchers," his family declared.

"It was understood when we decided to give this play," went on Fred, "that bills were to be paid as we went along. We have some money in the treasury and it is to be used to pay expenses. What we make on the play is for the class gift, or, if we go in the hole, we'll have to take it for expenses. But the very thing some of you are doing now, holding up bills, was expressly talked against. Mr. Watts says that every bit of work so far done must be paid for by the end of this week. You know the temptation is to spend more than we need to, if we think the bills don't have to be paid till June."

"Yes, and if we get the comfortable idea that we can dip into the proceeds to pay for anything we have to, we're going to lose our heads entirely," said Charlie Hunter.

"Well, let's check up here and now," Miss Haverstraw remarked briskly. "We have to wait for Miss Lister who is to play the solo dance. We have time to go over those famous vouchers now, Fred."

Janice moved uneasily. She foresaw an argument ahead.

"I haven't put in the bill for the Princess's frock for the first act, Miss Haverstraw," she explained. "I thought I'd wait and see if we needed any more for curtains or other things."

"Why, I haven't even seen my dress stuff," said Edith blankly.

"Signed any bills lately?" Fred asked Linda in a low aside.

She shook her head. Why *would* Janice persist in making these scenes. A sudden weariness and distaste for the whole performance attacked Linda. Why not let Janice do the costumes to suit herself and be done with this eternal haggling?

"If you have the voucher with you, Linda can sign it now and then we'll pay it to-morrow," Fred was saying.

"I haven't asked Linda for her signature," retorted Janice.

"Here's my slip for the lion's tail," said one of the boys, handing up a much-soiled piece of paper. "Linda signed it a week ago and I've been carrying it around ever since."

The lion's tail was a strip of fringe and inexpensive. Fred was more concerned about the frock for the princess.

"Give Fred your voucher, Janice," prompted

Miss Haverstraw, a little impatiently. "The finances have to be kept straight."

"I haven't any," Janice said, meaning a voucher, not finances.

"But you couldn't buy material without it," argued the coach. "The treasurer has been warned not to pay out a cent without a properly countersigned slip."

"I charged the goods to my father's account," Janice flared.

"Now that's just what I don't like," said Fred. "This is a school play and anyone who can't abide by the rules——"

"Calm yourself," Miss Haverstraw advised, but her eyes were not as peaceful as her voice. "Janice, if you bought this material, who approved it? Have you submitted sketches of the gown?"

"I talked to Edith Groves about it," said Janice sullenly.

"That is beside the question. You are to submit designs and discuss colors with the stage manager. Linda, have you approved this material?"

"No-o," Linda admitted.

"Edith, did you——without consulting Linda?"

Edith abandoned whatever scruples she had against telling tales. If Janice was so pig-

headed and she would rather cross swords with the coach than give up her own idea, why the consequences be upon her own head.

"We had an argument about the stuff," said Edith. "I said the part calls for a rose-colored dress in the first act, and Janice insisted it must be blue and it just spoils everything."

"I'm sorry, but we can not use your blue material, Janice," Miss Haverstraw announced. "The play distinctly mentions the gown of the princess several times and it must be deep rose. I hope you'll make a sketch at once and show it to Linda. Then you'll get your voucher and the delay will be trifling. Ready, Miss Lister?"

Edith, doing her solo dance, thought nervously that Janice would make her a "fright." She knew the chairman of the costume committee far better than it is ever given a teacher to know any pupil, and there was a vindictive streak in Janice. Her friends who quarreled with her were aware that she had a policy which made "getting even" a necessity.

Linda slipped out into the hall, as the chorus crashed into their second song and found Blake Marsh staring disconsolately out of a corridor window.

"Estelle Carr is home sick in bed," he told Linda, "and her mother says she is sick because Jimmie Andrews criticized her drawings and

turned them down. It was no fault of Jimmie's and I'm just trying to get up my nerve to go and see Mrs. Carr and tell her I'm the guilty one."

"Don't be a goose," Linda cheered him. "I hope Jimmie wasn't any meaner than he had to be, but artists have such sensitive nerves, it's never safe to say boo to them. You let Estelle alone and she'll recover quickly. More quickly, perhaps, than if you opened her wound afresh, by referring to it."

"Do you think so?" asked Blake hopefully.

"I'm almost sure," Linda said. "Be sure you praise something she does and she will be all right. How is everything coming, anyway?"

Blake plunged into a technical description that lasted half an hour. Then Linda went back and extracted the fascinated children who always wanted to stay till the last minute, and decided that she had had a full day. She left Buddy and Lucy at their gate and went on to the brown house. though it was cream now, she always called it that in her mind, and not until she entered the front hall, did she remember Mary. This was the afternoon she was to have come and talked with Miss Gilly.

CHAPTER XIV

MISSING—A BROTHER

"Did Mary come?" asked Linda, putting her head in at the kitchen door.

Grandma Poore was finishing the ironing. It had been a fine day for drying clothes and that meant she could iron the same day she washed, always a decided factor in her plain, sunny philosophy.

"Yes, she was here," she answered brightly. "A real nice girl, Linda. I wanted her to stay and see the children and so did Carol, but she didn't feel that she could stay. I am afraid she was going to walk, too, because she was too late for the four o'clock bus and she went too early to get the five o'clock."

Patty and David were sent upstairs to wash their hands and that gave Grandma an opportunity to confide that Mary had said she saw no reason why she should stay to meet the children.

"I don't expect to like them, it isn't necessary and they won't like me," she had declared.

"I'll do my duty by them and I'll be thankful to work for you, Miss Gilly, for no one knows what it means to me to get through school. But I'm honest and so I'll tell you in advance that I can't make a fuss over Patty and David. Children simply do not interest me."

Linda looked a little queer when she heard this.

"Land, child, you needn't worry," said Miss Gilly, who had come out to the kitchen while Grandma was reporting Mary's odd speech. "Mary is entirely too sure of her feelings. She's got a little plan of how she thinks she will act, mapped out in her mind, but she doesn't know, when the time comes, what she will do. She is dependable. I realized that as soon as I saw her and she couldn't be unkind if she tried. So I think we'll get along beautifully. She is to come home from school directly at half past two and do anything Grandma needs her to do, till Patty and David get in a little after three o'clock. Afternoons when they are not rehearsing, she is to stay with them till five and then her time is her own for study. I offered her Saturday afternoons and all day Sunday at home but she doesn't want to go home."

"Well, she may, after a bit," put in Grandma wisely.

"I took her upstairs and showed her your

room, Linda," Miss Gilly added. "I thought she ought to see where she is to sleep. I explained about the separate beds and that you were willing to divide the bureau drawers, and she seemed to be pleased. She is coming Thursday."

Jimmie Andrews came over after supper the next night and was "tickled pink" so he assured Miss Gilly, to hear that Mary was coming.

"She'd be a darn nice girl, if she wouldn't take everything so seriously," said Jimmie. "Yes, I know she has troubles, but Linda had troubles. For the matter of that, she has 'em yet. But she can still laugh, can't you, Linda? Even if Estelle Carr is on the verge of a nervous breakdown because I told her her drawings looked as Tony's fruit stand would look if some one upset it."

"Is Estelle really sick?" Linda demanded anxiously.

"I think myself it is the review algebra she aims to avoid, not her inartistic fellow students," said Jimmie.

"If I said that you'd say 'meow'," Linda retorted vigorously.

"Of course, but you didn't say it," the unabashed Jimmie pointed out. "Where are all the cherubs this evening, by the way? Seems to

me it is rather early to be enjoying such calm."

"Aunt Carol put David to bed early, because he didn't come home at four o'clock as he promised," Linda explained. "He has struck up a great friendship with Albert Margate and if we didn't say anything I'm afraid he would live there. Albert has a marvelous rocking-horse and David adores it."

"But Patty and the Hampton kids?" prompted Jimmie.

"Patty stands up for David when he is punished," Linda said with a little trill of laughter. "It's really funny, for she is so ready to knock him over on the slightest provocation, or none at all, yet when he is taken to task, Patty flies into a rage and defends him. I'm never sure whether it is because she feels he is unjustly accused, or because she wishes to go on record as being opposed to all punishment."

"That's more like it," said Jimmie wisely.

"The Hampton children," Linda went on, "are—let me see, where are they? Oh yes, some one, somewhere, is having a birthday celebration and they have gone to help cut the birthday cake."

"Well, it's grand and peaceful," commented Jimmie, "and for once I can talk to you without having to watch you sow seeds, or gather the eggs, or rip a dress, or go over printers'

proofs. You don't know how well you do nothing, Linda, because this is probably the first time you ever tried it."

"I was just going to suggest that you come in and help me number the tickets," Linda said, smiling.

"Nothing stirring," was Jimmie's slangy response. "It isn't your job, anyway; what's the matter with Fred's committee?"

"Busy," said Linda. "I can do the tickets at odd moments and I was perfectly willing to, for the last church supper the missionary society gave, was followed by fearful confusion. Two or three had worked at numbering and tickets and the numbers were duplicated and everyone shifted the blame. This way, I can keep track."

"Remember what Miss Haverstraw said, that a good executive gets others to do the detail, leaving his mind and time free for planning," Jimmie reminded her.

Linda leaned back comfortably against the porch post. They were sitting on the steps.

"The only trouble with that excellent advice," she remarked, "is that the entire class heard it. Whereupon they all decided to show executive ability and what we need now is some one willing to do the details."

Jimmie stayed perhaps an hour longer and

before he went home, Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore came out for a moment—to breathe the night air, they said, but they brought with them a plate of little iced cakes and a pitcher of the delicious grape juice Grandma had put up in the fall.

On their way to school the next morning, Linda and the children passed the Margate house, just as Albert and his mother came down the path.

"Don't you have to go to school?" challenged David enviously.

"Albert would rather go to school than go to the dentist's," Mrs. Margate smiled. "We're going in to the city for the day and see Dr. Gerry while we are there."

Patty rubbed an apprehensive finger hastily, over her even little teeth. Yes, they were all there and she was glad she had remembered to brush them that morning. Sometimes she forgot and Linda had told her what happened to children who neglected to brush their teeth—they had to go and see the dentist and tell him.

"Won't you be home when school is out?" asked David.

"We may come back on the 3.15, but I'm not sure," Mrs. Margate answered him. "If I go to see my sister, we'll be later."

"You see I thought maybe I could ride Albert's horse," said David.

Linda looked at Mrs. Margate and laughed.

"I'm afraid Albert doesn't get a fair chance to ride his own horse," Linda said, smiling. "David thinks it is the most wonderful horse he ever saw."

"Well, you come to-morrow, David, and you'll surely find us at home," declared Mrs. Margate. "We'll have to hurry now, so that we will not miss our train. I'll look for you to-morrow afternoon."

David, walking on toward school, did not seem enthusiastic over his invitation.

"I'll bet she knows I have to be an elf to-morrow," he grumbled.

"Sure enough, there is a rehearsal to-morrow," said Linda, who had forgotten the schedule for a moment. "Never mind, David, you'll have plenty of days you can play with Albert. And of course you would rather be an elf than ride a rocking-horse."

David did not answer, but tramped on moodily. Linda forgot his grievance before they reached school and when she saw him again at noon, he appeared to be his usual contained self. He was always so silent that his friends had to guess at his thoughts, but Linda knew by his expression that he was not unhappy.

However, he was not waiting to walk home with her at the close of the afternoon session. The Morrisville school was one of the few which held a morning and afternoon class for its kindergarten children and so Linda could always count on company for her homeward walk. Patty was waiting and Buddy and Lucy, but no David was anywhere in sight.

"He may have gone on ahead," said Linda. "We'll go home and see."

Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore were busy in Linda's room, getting it ready for Mary. The new bed had come and while Linda regretted the space that had to be given two single beds, she admitted that a little cramping was vastly preferable to being asked to sleep with another girl. Linda had slept alone all her life, while Mary had usually slept with a younger sister. Both would appreciate the luxury of single beds, but for different reasons.

"David?" said Miss Gilly when Linda asked her if she had seen the child. "Why, no, he hasn't come home. Do you suppose he has gone to Albert's again? He never did go without first asking permission, but this time perhaps he slipped away."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't go there to-day," said Linda confidently. "We met Mrs Margate this morning and she said she and Albert would

be in the city all day. I'll walk back to school, I think, and see if he could be playing in the basement. Sometimes the boys go down and play tag there, until the janitor chases them out."

Grandma Poore was spreading snowy sheets on Mary's bed.

"If you'll wait a minute, Linda, I'll come down and sit in the front window and watch Patty and the Hampton children," she said.

Since the advent of Patty and David, Linda had, at intervals, regretted the old fence which had once inclosed the yard. Not, she admitted, that a fence would keep Patty or David behind it, if they wished to roam, but it might induce them, by mental suggestion, to stay more willingly where they were supposed to be. Linda had herself removed the old, rickety fence and the hedge, with which she had replaced it, while green and slightly, was not yet tall or thick enough to form much protection.

"I'll take the children with me," said Linda now. "They can help me hunt and I don't suppose anything has happened to David——" she paused uncertainly.

"No, it isn't likely anything has happened to him," Grandma Poore agreed cheerfully, "but you know how it is with children, you have to know where they are every minute."

"Yes'm," said Linda.

Grandma's eyes twinkled above the pillow she was expertly stuffing into a clean white case.

"This bringing up a family is hard work, isn't it, Linda?" she suggested.

This time it was Linda who laughed.

"It's work all right," she stated, "but then it is fun, too."

She went downstairs to gather up Patty and Buddy and Lucy who heard the news that they were to walk back to school, with beaming faces. It mattered little to them where they went, if Linda was going there.

"I'll tell you where I think David is," said Patty gravely, as they started off, "I think he has gone back to see Mrs. Lawson."

Linda stared at her. Strange she had not thought of that possibility. Of course David had left Mrs. Lawson of his own volition, but he would be just as apt to go back without taking anyone into his confidence.

CHAPTER XV

SUDDEN EXCITEMENT

LINDA was more firmly convinced that Patty had solved the mystery of David's whereabouts, at each step she took. She questioned the child, but Patty insisted that David had never said anything to her about going back to Watertown.

"I shouldn't think he would act this way," said Patty, as if she were forty instead of four years old, "because he wants to be an elf. But if he doesn't come back, can Brenda Harton be an elf in his place, Linda?"

"I don't know," said Linda shortly.

She was irritated by Patty's apparent indifference. Yet her common sense and honesty forced her to admit David had not displayed much affection for Patty, indeed the two children were frequently hostile toward each other. In planning her "family" Linda had overlooked the question of conflicting temperaments. She had taken it for granted that brothers and sisters would love each other

dearly and strive to be mutually helpful. She was genuinely puzzled when Patty and David quarreled, not as Buddy and Lucy did, with brief spats and quick reconciliations, but with actual bitterness and a sudden dislike that could last for days.

When they reached the school, deserted now by all save the janitor, Linda went at once to the basement. No, she knew as soon as she descended the stairs, there were no boys playing tag there this afternoon. The place was too quiet and the janitor, "sweeping up" confirmed her impressions.

"I haven't seen a lad since three o'clock," announced Mr. Nailor placidly. "Not a sign of a boy. For which, I will own, I am grateful. When there's work to be done the fewer boys around the better."

Linda smiled and said she would have to look elsewhere.

"I told you he went to Mrs. Lawson's," insisted Patty.

"Well, he may have started," Linda conceded, "but he hasn't had time to walk more than a mile or two. If I knew positively that he had gone in that direction we could overtake him."

"I wouldn't care so much," remarked Buddy conversationally. "If he doesn't come back,

Linda, I know a boy who would like to be an elf in his place."

"Of all the cold-blooded imps!" Linda cried, laughing in spite of herself. "Don't you care what happens to David?" she demanded.

"Yes, I do," said Lucy, "he has one of my paper dolls. He said he would glue it for me. I tore it."

Linda gave up—time enough to lecture on brotherly love and good will, when she had found the missing David.

They were walking slowly home, the three children wrangling amiably over the words of one of the songs the chorus had been practising that afternoon, and Linda wondering where she should take a bus and seek David on the road that led to Watertown twenty miles away. She could easily overtake the child, if he had really gone in that direction, but she could not bear the thought of the time wasted if he had not taken that road.

"My goodness!" gasped Linda suddenly. "Who's this?"

The three children saw the apparition simultaneously and pressed close to Linda. A woman was coming toward them, her hands upraised in horror, her hair streaming in the breeze. She was shouting, but they could not

hear what she said, until she came nearer. Then it burst on their ears like a foghorn.

"Burglars!" screamed the woman. "Burglars!"

Morrisville was a small town and at that time in the afternoon there were few people on the streets. But those who were, were not deaf, and they stopped to listen. In a moment heads began to appear in the windows and figures popped out on the porches.

"Burglars! Gracious, somebody come quick, burglars!" the woman cried loudly, waving her arms as though by this gesture she hoped to fend off the real or imagined foe.

Linda recognized her now. She was Mrs. Kitchen and her son was in Linda's class at school.

"Please don't scream," begged Linda as calmly as she could.

Buddy was opening his mouth to howl and Linda herself felt queer prickles going up and down her spine. But screaming wouldn't do any good unless it frightened away the burglars, and Linda saw no signs of burglars.

"Where are they?" she asked hurriedly. "Did you see them? Is there some one in your house?"

Mrs. Kitchen gasped. She shook her head. For a moment she was unable to speak, and

then she recovered her breath with a great rush.

"They're in Mrs. Margate's house," she said explosively.

Linda remembered that Mrs. Margate had spent the day in the city and the burglars had probably known it, too.

"What is it? What's the matter?" came a chorus from the neighboring porches. "Is there a fire?"

"Burglars!" Mrs. Kitchen screamed, encouraged again, "Burglars! Somebody come quick."

One or two women screamed in sympathy and Buddy let out one dreadful howl before Linda stopped him with a look.

"Telephone," she urged. "The thing to do is to telephone. Have you a phone, Mrs. Kitchen?"

Mrs. Kitchen gulped and pathetically tried to pin up her streaming hair.

"Yes, I have a phone," she nodded, "and I must go right back as Mrs. Margate and Albert are all alone in my house."

As she started to run, Linda ran after her. Behind them streamed a motley procession of women, a few men and a baker's dozen of small boys, these last deliciously excited and hoping to see a "real" burglar in action.

Some of the women carried dish towels, others

had their sewing, all exactly as they had been interrupted. Linda, running beside Mrs. Kitchen, heard a few more details, though the poor woman was anything but coherent in her recital.

"You could have knocked me over with a feather," she panted. "I was upstairs, doing my hair when I heard the front door burst open and Mrs. Margate was downstairs calling me. I rushed down and she said there was some one in her house, white as a sheet, and Albert crying fit to break his heart."

The crowd by this time had swelled to large proportions. No one was exactly sure what had happened and this uncertainty allowed a wide scope for reports. Some told others that they had heard there was a murder; others insisted it was a fire; the less sensational contented themsevles with reporting that some one had told them the gas pipes had burst.

They came to Mrs. Kitchen's house before the Margate home, which was fortunate since it is doubtful if Mrs. Kitchen could ever have brought herself to pass it even to reach her own front door. Perhaps she expected to be shot from one of the windows. Anyway she dashed to her side entrance and Linda dashed with her.

Patty and Buddy and Lucy went wherever Linda went, as a matter of course, and they

slipped in close behind her. But the crowd stayed at a safe distance on the other side of the street ready to run if "anything happened."

In the hall Linda saw Mrs. Margate, chalky white, Albert crying bitterly in her arms.

"Are there burglars, really?" asked Linda gently.

Mrs. Margate was level-headed and though she might be frightened, she was not hysterical.

"I came home on the four o'clock train," she whispered. "As soon as I opened the door, I heard footsteps upstairs. Then a rumbling sound, as if something was being dragged across the floor. Albert heard it too, and dragged me to the door. We ran over here. Burglars just about frighten me to death!" she added apologetically.

"I should think they would," said Linda. "Where's the telephone? I see—I'll call the chief of police, but that crowd is enough to scare off any burglar,' she added sensibly.

Linda thought she was very cool and calm and collected, and compared to Mrs. Kitchen and Mrs. Margate, she was cool. But her hands shook as she took down the telephone book and finally she had to give up hunting for the number and instead ask Central to give her the police station.

"Burglars!" stammered Linda into the

mouthpiece when a rasping voice asked her, "Well, what is it?" for the second time.

"So—where?" the voice drawled.

"At 56 Lawn Avenue," said Linda, giving Mrs. Kitchen's number supplied by that agitated lady.

"Be right over," was the comforting assurance as the receiver at the other end of the line clicked into place.

Morrisville had a small police force, but burglars in the daytime merited special attention, Chief Royce believed. In a very few minutes the Chief appeared, accompanied by the three policemen who constituted his force.

The crowd grew tense as the uniformed men dashed into number 56 Lawn Avenue and Linda felt a thrill before the majesty of the law.

"Somebody said there were burglars here!" the Chief challenged her.

He was a small man, with sandy whiskers and very direct pale blue eyes. He seemed to hold Linda personally accountable for the fact that no burglars were in sight.

"They're next door in Mrs. Margate's house," she explained. "She was away in the city all day and when she came home and opened her door, she heard footsteps and something being dragged over the floor."

"Upstairs?" said the Chief.

"Upstairs," Linda confirmed.

"All right," declared the Chief. "Sam, you stand in front of the house, and you, Jack, watch the back. Herb and me'll go through."

They filed across the lawn that separated the two houses and a murmur swept through the crowd. Now something was surely going to happen. Mrs. Kitchen and Mrs. Margate, Linda and the four children peered through the windows which commanded a view of the side yards. Mrs. Kitchen had locked every window and the house was stifling, but she was not minded to have a burglar come upon her unawares, after what had befallen her neighbor.

The Chief and "Herb" disappeared into the Margate front hall. There were a few moments of tense anxiety—then everyone jumped as a window on the second floor was flung up with a crash.

"I've got him!" shouted the Chief in a voice that carried through the closed windows of the house next door.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BURGLAR APOLOGIZES

Linda ran to the door, the others following.

"I've got him," shrieked the Chief again.

The crowd craned expectant necks. Mrs. Kitchen gazed with her mouth half opened. Patty clung tightly to Linda's hand and Buddy and Lucy were poised to fly at the first hint of disaster.

The Chief went away from the window. There was a blank moment or so, when the imaginative might picture him as descending the stairs with his captive, and then he stepped out on the porch.

"Why——" something like consternation was in the murmur that went through the waiting group. "Why—it's a little boy!"

Linda stared as though she, too, were hypnotized.

"Huh," said Buddy in a weary tone, "it's only David!"

Buddy felt cheated, here he had been waiting to see a burglar and the "burglar" was no one but David.

"Here's your burglar, Mrs. Margate," called the Chief, who saw no reason for keeping a secret and whose voice was normally loud and hearty. "I found this young man upstairs and he says he's been alone in the house for the last couple of hours, so I guess he's the answer to your scare."

Mrs. Margate was relieved. She was used to small boys and anything they might do did not alarm or surprise her. Burglars were a different matter. But David was no burglar.

"All right, Mr. Royce, I'm sorry I have given you so much trouble," she said graciously, crossing over the lawn to her own porch, Linda and the children after her.

"Next time I'll investigate, before I lose my head," she added, smiling.

"What had I better do with him, do you think?" the Chief asked, eying David uncertainly.

Linda moved a step nearer, but Mrs. Margate put an arm around David and drew him to her.

"Do with him?" she echoed sharply. "Why, nothing, of course. He is a great friend of my Albert's, and he was probably looking for Albert."

The Chief said "Huh," and scratched his head, but as he hadn't the slightest idea of what

he ought to do in this extraordinary situation he wisely decided that his official duty had been accomplished. He signaled his men to go on and lifting his cap, he departed with dignity. The crowd melted away more slowly, but as Linda and her flock followed Mrs. Margate into the house, they too decided that nothing more was going to happen, and gradually dispersed.

"What *were* you doing, David?" asked Linda as soon as the door was closed and they were safe from those prying eyes.

David was quite unruffled. It meant little to him that the arm of the law had reached in and plucked him forth, to hold him up to the public gaze. He looked at Linda serenely.

"I was riding Albert's rocking-horse," he explained kindly.

"Now that was the noise I heard," said Mrs. Margate, enlightened.

"But, David," Linda protested, "you knew Mrs. Margate wasn't home, she told you she was going away this morning. You can not go around in people's houses when they are not at home."

"I did," was David's answer to this. "I had a good time. I hardly ever get enough rides on the rocking-horse, Albert always wants to ride it."

"It happens to be his horse," said Linda briefly. "How did you get in the house?"

"I opened the door," David spoke sullenly now, for he resented her evident disapproval.

"I hardly ever lock the front door," declared Mrs. Margate. "But I will after this—if I'm going to have such jumpy nerves, I'd better not leave any loopholes."

Albert had raced upstairs to assure himself that his rocking-horse had not been spirited away. Linda suspected that he thought David might have concealed it in his pockets in some mysterious manner. There seemed to be nothing more to do except to gather up Patty and David and Lucy and Buddy and take them home.

"I am so sorry," apologized Linda. "I never dreamed David would do such a thing, Mrs. Margate, never. We were hunting him, he didn't come home from school and Aunt Carol was worried."

"Oh, children always do the unexpected," Mrs. Margate assured her lightly. "I'm the one who has upset the town, but I thought there were real burglars and if there is anything I'm afraid of, it is a burglar."

Linda knew David well enough to know that there was no use suggesting any sort of apology on his part. Not then. In the first place, she

doubted if he had a clear idea of what he had done, much less of the trouble he had caused. He could be fearfully stubborn, and small as he was, was capable of creating a scene. She wisely decided to wait until she had an opportunity to talk to him alone.

As they went down the steps, Linda noted to her relief, that the curious folk had gone. Mrs. Kitchen was watching from behind a fold of her sash curtains, but Mrs. Kitchen was entitled to watch. She, poor woman, had put in a trying couple of hours.

"I thought you'd gone to see Mrs. Lawson," remarked Patty to David.

"I'm never going to see her," David said firmly.

Buddy and Lucy, bursting with news to tell their mother were left at their gate. No wonder they clamored to be allowed to go wherever Linda went, for didn't excitement and "something different" usually wait on Linda's going. Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore, watching from the windows, welcomed the return of what Grandma called the "relief expedition."

Of course the story was all over Morrisville by the next day. There was even a paragraph or two about David in the "Morrisville Messenger," the weekly which was published the next Friday. But Linda had had her chance to talk

to David and she had made him understand, with more ease than she had dared hope, something of the sacredness of possession.

"Mrs. Margate's house is her very own and Albert's horse is his very own, dear," she had explained seriously, while David's beautiful and inscrutable dark eyes had rested intently on her gray ones.

"Just as Aunt Carol's house is her very own, and your express wagon is your very own. You wouldn't like it, if a boy walked into Aunt Carol's house and went to playing with your express wagon, you know you wouldn't like that, David."

And David, whose express wagon was the apple of his eye, admitted honestly enough that he wouldn't like that at all. For Jimmie had made the wagon for him and painted it red and yellow and it was the envy of Buddy Hampton, who pointedly reminded Jimmie, at every possible opportunity, that no one had ever *made him* a wagon.

"So, of course," Linda had concluded her explanations, "of course you'll want to go over and tell Mrs. Margate that you didn't understand and that you're sorry you frightened her. For she was very much frightened, dear."

David was quite willing to go and make his apologies. Linda didn't say he had to go and

therefore he did not feel that he was yielding to authority, and yielding to anything or anyone was not to be contemplated for a minute by this queer, wistful little bundle of faults and virtues. Mrs. Margate gave him lemonade and cake and explained that women are really quite foolish about burglars. They arranged it so that the next time she felt frightened, she was to telephone for David, and he would come over and make short work of any intruders that might be lurking in her house.

While David was patching up his mistakes, Mary Rice arrived, "bag and baggage," as Grandma Poore said. Grandma's conversation was always quotable and she had a fund of homely sayings that invariably delighted Linda. Proverbs and "signs" sprinkled her talk and gave it a quaint flavor.

"Mary, this is Patty," said Linda when she came home from school, having dropped David at the Margate's gate.

"How do you do, Patty?" Mary said sedately.

Patty stared shyly. She wasn't an especially friendly child, but compared with David, she was voluble. Now she seemed to have lost her tongue completely.

"Mary is going to live with us," said Linda. "She goes to high school and just think of all the things she can tell us!"

"Is she in the play?" Patty asked.

"No, you know none of the high school pupils are in the play," said Mary. "It is for the eighth grade——" she stopped so suddenly that Linda was puzzled.

"Who plays the piano?" asked Mary, her eyes fixed on the rosewood instrument.

"None of us—yet," Linda answered, running her fingers over the keys caressingly. "Isn't it lovely? Aunt Carol gave it to me and she says I may start lessons this summer. She thought I ought not to take up anything new until after graduation. And Patty is to learn to play, too, and David, if he wishes."

A piano had long been a dream of Linda's and just to have one in the house added immeasurably to her happiness. Something in Mary's eyes made her wonder if she were fond of music.

"Have you a piano?" piped up Patty.

"No," said Mary, "no, I haven't. But I can play a little by ear. Do you mind if I try yours?"

"How perfectly lovely!" Linda cried with such whole-souled enthusiasm that the more restrained Mary stared at her in amazement. "Oh, Mary, if you can play, that will be wonderful. Play something for us right away, please do."

Mary sat down on the bench and rested her fingers on the keys.

"I can't read a note. Hum something to start me," she commanded.

Patty liked to sing and she began to hum the "Elf Song" from the school play. Instantly Mary found the chords and the music rippled gayly, under and around the childish treble that chanted the words so clearly. Miss Gilly came to the door of the living room and Grandma peeped over her shoulder.

"Mary can play!" Linda turned a radiant face on the audience. "She can play our piano. Isn't that the nicest thing that ever happened!"

Mary, following her upstairs a few minutes later, was turning this joyous remark over in her mind.

"Funny," she was thinking. "I wouldn't be so tickled over seeing some one do something I can't do. I can't stand Coralie Black because she knows her chemistry without looking at it. I guess Linda isn't jealous of other girls. But then she doesn't have to be, everyone likes her and I never was popular."

CHAPTER XVII

TRIFLES, BUT NOT PERFECTION

Mary fitted into her niche conscientiously, that was the word. She was capable and had initiative and it was necessary to tell her, or show her, a thing only once. But while she did all she was asked to do with painstaking exactness, she saw no reason why she should be expected to enjoy the daily program.

The two girls argued this attitude frequently, usually at night when they were preparing for bed.

"I like to have some fun as I go along," Linda's favorite slogan would be brought into play. "Great, big wonderful happiness only comes now and then, but there are plenty of little things to enjoy as you work your head off in the general grind."

"I won't pretend," would be Mary's counter retort. "I'm going to do what I set out to do, but I will not make believe a band is playing and that I'm having the time of my life."

The children did not "take" to Mary, though

she was kindness itself to them and they were more and more with her as "The Rose Jar" absorbed an increasing share of Linda's time.

"Linda is lots more fun," Patty confided to Jimmie, who found her frowning in a state of unwonted idleness late one afternoon when he brought an extra order of groceries.

Linda was at rehearsal Patty informed him, and Mary and David had gone up town to exchange Grandma Poore's library book.

"Why didn't you go along?" suggested Jimmie.

"I don't like Mary Rice, that's why," Patty declared. "She doesn't like us, either; she just wants to go through school and she has to stand us."

Jimmie stared aghast at this four-year-old philosopher.

"I don't think you ought to talk like that," he said mildly.

Patty picked up a stone and hurled it.

"You mind your own affairs," she cried angrily.

But this time she had overstepped even the easy-going Jimmie's bounds. She found her wrist seized in a tight grip.

"Do you want your mouth washed out with soap and water, or do you want me to tell Linda

and let her put Brenda Harton in your place as an elf?" he asked sternly.

Patty flew into one of her tantrums, kicked and cried and tried in vain to break away. He held her firmly and at intervals repeated his question quietly.

"You—you can wash it," sobbed Patty, surrendering at last. "Don't tell Linda."

She knew, as Jimmie did, that the severest penalty hung over her, imposed on the occasion of the last stone throwing when she had narrowly missed injuring Lucy Hampton. Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore and Linda had solemnly decreed that no punishment could be too heavy for a little girl who threw stones.

Jimmie looked at the tear-stained face of the small sinner and his heart relented. She had a fearful temper, but she was a nice kid. Yet she could not be allowed to go through life hurling stones at everyone who had the misfortune to displease her. He suddenly decided to keep his threat.

"Anybody home?" he asked Patty.

"Grand-grandma," she gulped.

"Well, she won't tell. Come on now and take your dose and see if you can't behave yourself after this," said Jimmie severely.

Patty was always surprising him, she surprised him now. She slipped her hand into his

and meekly trotted with him to the kitchen. Grandma Poore was putting away the groceries Jimmie had left on the table a few minutes ago and she looked her question at his reappearance.

"Patty and I have a little score to settle," he said and Grandma went on placidly putting the sugar and butter and eggs in their proper places, without asking any further explanation.

Jimmie led Patty to the sink and took a glass from the shelf over it. While she stared at him, half in terror, half in fascination, he shaved off a tiny bit of soap with his pocketknife, put it in the glass and filled it with water. He stirred this mixture carefully for a few moments and then turned to Patty.

"Now take a swallow of this," he said, "but hold it in your mouth. Rinse your mouth with it and don't let it go down your throat. Understand?"

Patty nodded dumbly and he held the glass to her lips. Tears rushed to her eyes as she tasted the soapy concoction, but she held the water obediently in her mouth and watched Jimmie imploringly.

"Spit it out!" he said sharply.

She obeyed and he mopped her mouth with his handkerchief and bade her open it—"wide."

"All right, I think it will do," he said solemnly. "How do you feel?"

Patty wasn't at all sure, but she managed to say, "all right," in a very small voice.

"Well, then see that you keep that way," commanded Jimmie. "I'm late and I'll have to run all the way back to the store. Be good, Patty, and you will be happy. 'By, Grandma——" and the door crashed behind him.

Patty ran an exploring pink tongue around her mouth, the faint taste of soap was still there.

"Have a chocolate peppermint," suggested Grandma, fishing out one from the depths of her apron pocket.

Patty ate it gratefully.

"I like Jimmie," she announced a few minutes later, with no preamble. "I like him much better than I do Mary Rice. Mary doesn't care whether I'm good or bad, but Jimmie takes pains to see that I'm good."

Patty was forever making odd speeches like this. Miss Gilly thought it was because she had been with older people so much, but Linda inclined to the theory that she was different from other children. Brighter, unquestionably. Patty was far quicker than David and grasped things with greater ease. True she didn't take as much trouble as he did to understand, and she was apt to forget her hastily acquired knowledge while whatever David learned he had stored

away safely in his brain for the rest of his life.

Linda often wished she had more time to ponder on the characteristic traits of the two children. She liked to analyze. Mary had the opportunity, but Mary was not interested. She read to Patty and David and she sat by reading to herself for hours while they and the Hampton children played in the sandbox under the horse chestnut tree in the side yard. But what they said and did Mary could not have told you an hour afterward. She interfered only when they quarreled and they soon learned not to "bother" her with questions. Linda sometimes wondered what kind of a teacher Mary would make, she so obviously hated to be interrupted by childish questions.

Linda herself was head over heels in "The Rose Jar." She said so, laughingly, but the extravagant statement was not so far from the truth. And every committee without exception was rapidly developing temperamental grievances that would have been humorous, they were so petty, if they had not been large because of their tragic possibilities.

"I'm the coach," Miss Haverstraw had announced early in the proceedings. "My business is to whip this production into shape. I won't stand for any sulking on the stage and any jealousies and bickerings that interfere with the

performance of the cast will be dealt with summarily. I can discipline my actors, but I will have nothing to do with the contributing factors. That is up to the stage manager, it's part of your job, Linda, to see that the committees function properly and with as little friction as possible."

That was Miss Haverstraw, very crisp and competent and apparently a stranger to fatigue. Linda admired her tremendously, as did everyone who worked with her.

"But I am not Miss Haverstraw," said Linda to Edith Groves. "She can say 'Go, do this,' and 'Kindly stop that' and they fall into line like little wooden soldiers. But I've heard four girls call me 'that bossy Linda Lane' in the last week, yet how can I push things, unless I direct?"

"What do you care what they call you?" Edith protested. "If this show falls flat, they'll call you worse than bossy. We need some one with a good firm will, and you're the right person in the right place. Don't apologize for your executive ability—use it."

Linda found that if the play was to be a success, she would have to ignore any adverse comments and use her own judgment. Janice Adams gave her the most trouble and there had not been a single costume planned without argu-

ments, approaching dangerously close to quarrels. Janice was determined not to submit sketches, Fred Vaney resolutely refused to let any vouchers go through without Linda's initials and he insisted that bills were to be submitted as fast as they were incurred.

The large doll that was to take the part of the fairy in the rose jar, proved to be another source of trouble. Linda hoped to substitute a baby when the play was finally presented, but even the coach was doubtful of the wisdom of this.

"You never can depend on children," she said. "Now Patty is small enough, almost, but a red-haired fairy is not poetical. A younger child would be likely to spoil the whole thing by crying as the lights and the crowd and the excitement would frighten her. No, Linda, pin your hopes on a doll. Have you found one yet?"

"Mr. Farrington is getting one for me," Linda replied. "Jimmie Andrews spoke to him and he said he could get us one of those figures they use in store windows, a two-year-old size. But Janice had already spoken to her uncle. He has a store in the city and he sent her a doll."

"Well?" said Miss Haverstraw quizzically.

"It has long black curls," Linda admitted reluctantly.

"Take it away," said Miss Haverstraw

firmly. "We must have golden hair. Long black curls are charming, but the popular notion of a fairy demands golden hair. We must have it."

"Yes'm," Linda acquiesced meekly.

But she did not relish the task of telling Janice that her doll could not be used. Janice was quite capable of insinuating that Linda had stipulated a blond fairy.

Probably no school play was ever staged without some wrangling and heart-burning. It is natural to long to be admired and to seize the chance to demonstrate the talent and ability that everyone of us is sure is hidden in our make-up. "That bossy Linda Lane" came in for severe criticism at the tongues of many who considered themselves abused and held back and there were not lacking those who said that she wanted "all the spotlight for herself."

Then, as a contrast and relief, there were afternoons when everything went smoothly. When a beaming art committee wheeled the completed scenery for the first act into place and tasted the intoxication of spontaneous applause. When Edith Groves trailed across the stage in her rose gown, opened a window, and a flood of stage sunshine enveloped her in such glowing light that her loveliness made even those who knew her gasp.

It was after breathing spells like these, that Linda would assure herself that of course the play was bound to be a success. Hadn't she disposed of forty tickets and weren't the funds holding out beyond their wildest expectations? Hadn't Miss Bascom and the other teachers on the advisory committee declared that this was by far the best "show" the Morrisville graduating class had ever attempted to give?

CHAPTER XVIII

BREAKERS AHEAD

THE tables of the Morrisville Public Library were narrow. Two could sit comfortably on either side, but only the most absent-minded could remain in ignorance of their neighbors. The absent-minded or absorbed.

On this afternoon, Linda belonged to the latter class. She was deep in perusal of a book of folk tales (intent on the delightful business of learning the details of an authentic fairy's costume) and when a slip of paper was shoved across the shining oak of the table top, she paid no attention.

It was a warm May afternoon and there were not many people in the library. Out of doors was far more alluring to the majority of folk with leisure. On Linda's right sat a gruff-looking old gentleman wearing thick glasses. He had taken down a book to verify some notes he had made and an article had attracted his attention. He was reading hastily, his pencil poised in air, his free hand resting significantly, if uncon-

sciously on the warning sign "Silence", which made an ornamental little fence to divide the table into halves.

The little slip of paper was shoved, steadily and persistently. It reached Linda's book and still she paid no attention. Then, very gradually, it began a march down her printed page.

She glanced up with a start. There was Jimmie Andrews staring at her intently. Jimmie, who should to all intents and purposes have been at work in the Farrington grocery store.

He pointed to the paper slip and she let her gaze drop to that.

"Have you heard anything?" she read.

Her eyes, a little frightened this time, sought his again.

"It's all right," his lips formed the words soundlessly. "Heard anything?"

Linda shook her head.

Jimmie jerked his in the direction of the door. Linda hastily gathered up her papers and followed him out, leaving the gruff-looking old gentleman as unaware of her departure as he had been of her presence.

"There's nothing the matter," said Jimmie reassuringly as soon as they found themselves on the sun-soaked stone steps. "I mean there is nothing the matter with anyone—anyone who counts, I mean."

"Just what," Linda inquired coolly, "do you mean?"

Jimmie laughed and clapped his cap on his head with a gesture of relief.

"I was afraid you'd think something had happened to Miss Gilly or some of the folks at home," he explained.

Linda, who at first had feared just that, waited.

"Let's walk out toward the trolley line," suggested Jimmie, starting down the steps. "I've already been to your house looking for you, so they won't worry if you don't come home right away. Miss Gilly told me I d find you at the library."

Linda, curious as to what he might have to tell her, fell into step at his side.

"Gee, you can walk," said Jimmie admiringly. "I remember once I told you I could tell you from any girl in Morrisville by the way you walked."

"Give me patience!" Linda implored the fleece-dappled sky.

"Well, it's a rather long story," said Jimmie.

Then, having in his mind prepared her for what he had to say, he proceeded to tell his story in one brief and startling sentence.

"You may have the resignations of the entire

cast of 'The Rose Jar' handed to you tomorrow."

Linda simply stared. For a moment or two she could not realize what he was saying.

"Resignations—'The Rose Jar'!" she repeated mechanically.

"Fred Vaney and Blake Marshall told me," said Jimmie. "They got wind of it in some way."

"But why? What is the reason ?" Linda insisted.

"Haven't you heard any threats? Have there been any ructions lately?" countered Jimmie.

Linda thought, going over in her mind, the events of the last few rehearsals.

"I can't think of a thing," she said. "I should say we'd been more at peace, these last two rehearsals than before. That's the truth."

"Well, girls are so queer," grumbled Jimmie, apparently thinking he had made an original statement.

"It seems that for some time they've been grumbling because you chose Nettie Small as one of the elves."

Linda's head went up, and her chin became her most prominent feature.

"Then you *do* know?" said Jimmie shrewdly.

"I've heard them talk," Linda admitted. "I

thought that was all over long ago. Nettie makes one of the best elves and she is so small she looks like a piece of green thistledown floating around on the stage."

"What have they got against her?" asked Jimmie practically.

Linda sighed. She was suddenly conscious that she was tired.

"Let's sit on this rail fence, Jimmie," she suggested.

They had walked to the end of the town. Morrisville melted rather abruptly into country, with no suburbs as preparation and there was an inviting fence on one side of the road.

Linda scrambled up and Jimmie perched beside her.

"I think people can be too mean for words!" burst out Linda. "All the fuss they made about poor little Nettie Small seemed so silly and hateful, that I never repeated it even to Aunt Carol. As for telling Miss Haverstraw, I'd rather recite Mother Goose to her, it wouldn't waste any more of her time."

Jimmie waited patiently.

"The whole trouble is," Linda averred energetically, "every mother in town is wild to see her child in this play. It's partly because the children themselves are so crazy to be in it and partly because mothers just love to see their

children performing. Helen Ware has a cousin who teaches dancing school and she says the cousin loses her mind every time she gives a reception; each mother wants her child to do a solo dance and she doesn't want any other mother's child to do a thing!"

Jimmie laughed, as much at the energy of the speaker, as at her recital.

"It isn't funny," reproved Linda. "It's tragic. And I never did want Patty and David and Buddy and Lucy, all to be elves. I said in the beginning it looked as though I favored my own friends."

"Well, they chose them according to size, didn't they?" Jimmie offered helpfully.

"Yes, they did, and the next time we do any choosing they're going to choose them by numbers, if I have anything to say about it," declared Linda. "I only hope I live through this play. That's what Edith Groves goes around saying and I find I say it, too."

"Nettie?" Jimmie suggested tactfully.

"Oh yes, Nettie, it takes you to keep me on the track, Jimmie," said Linda gratefully. "Nettie was one of the smallest children in the kindergarten and the teacher said one of the most graceful. And the only thing those girls have against her, is that her father is in jail!"

"Oh—is he?" Jimmie said blankly.

"Certainly he is, though how a five-year-old child can help that, I never have been able to see," said Linda. "Her mother about kills herself, doing washing and cleaning and she keeps Nettie looking as though she'd been starched and ironed every hour. I didn't know when Nettie was chosen, where her father was or what he'd done. I don't know that yet and I don't care——" Linda in her earnestness was near to slipping off the fence and Jimmie put out a steadying hand.

"After I saw Mrs. Small's face, when she came to school to ask if she should make Nettie a new dress to wear 'in the show,' I would have made Nettie an elf if I had to walk over the mayor's daughter to get her a place."

Jimmie was looking thoughtfully at the ground.

"I've been thinking," went on Linda, excitedly. "Nettie is so small—I shouldn't wonder if she would do for the rose jar baby. Of course she is five years old and she may be too large. Still I believe I'll try it. Those people who think they have a right to look down on her and her mother will think twice when they see her in the most important rôle of the whole play next to Edith's and Willard's."

Still Jimmie did not speak.

"Jimmie Andrews, you don't side with those

"I'm thinking," said Jimmie slowly, "whether you have a right to wreck the whole play."

silly girls, do you?" Linda demanded hotly. "Janice Adams wants Brenda Harton in Nettie's place. Why, not one of them would care what Nettie's father had done, if they didn't have some one they wanted to get in as an elf."

"I'm thinking," said Jimmie slowly, "whether you have a right to wreck the whole play. After all, you know, it is the class play."

"I'm stage manager," Linda reminded him.

"Appointed to make a success of the whole thing for the class," said Jimmie. "You're working for the Morrisville Grammar School, not for Linda Lane."

Linda stared at him in amazement.

"Do you think I ought to take Nettie out of the cast, to make room for Brenda?" she asked, with something like horror in her expressive voice.

"I don't know," said Jimmie simply.

"Well, I know," Linda announced. "I know I am not going to do any such thing. What's more, I am going to put Nettie in as the rose jar baby and if she can't play the double rôle, then we'll be one elf short."

"Why don't you make Brenda the rose jar baby?" suggested Jimmie.

"Do you know Brenda Harton when you see her?" Linda flung at him with scorn. "She's fat and freckled and has three front teeth missing.

She would look nice, rising out of that jar, wouldn't she, and surveying the audience with a toothless smile?"

Jimmie snickered, then sobered quickly.

"Take my advice and don't push Nettie, Linda," he said. "I'm not so sure you ought not to withdraw her from the cast, not for any snobbish reasons, but because if you have a flock of resignations thrown at your head the play will have to be given up or postponed till another cast can be trained. However, if you use tact, you may be able to avert the trouble. You can not afford to be independent and flaunt Nettie in the face of the enemy."

"I think it is the only fair thing to do, to keep her where she is," maintained Linda. "It would be cruel to her and to her mother to take her out now. It wouldn't take a day for all kinds of rumors to be over town."

"All right, keep her in," Jimmie said. "I know as well as you do that, morally speaking, it is the only fair thing to do. But sometimes there are two duties and the larger one should be considered."

Linda glanced at him with new respect.

"I won't be silly," she promised. "Of course what I'd like to do would be to tell them I intend to make Nettie the rose jar baby and that if anyone does not care to act with her, he or she

may resign promptly. Instead I'll try to remember that this is a school play and short of taking out Nettie entirely, I'll do what I can to patch things up. Perhaps I can bribe Patty to let Brenda Harton have her place."

"Put off the next rehearsal for a day," Jimmie advised with his usual good sense. "From the talk the boys heard, things are at boiling point. It's just as well not to call them together until they've had a chance to simmer down."

"I think diplomacy is shameful," said Linda crossly, but she agreed.

CHAPTER XIX

CALLED INTO CONSULTATION

Linda posted the notice on the bulletin board the next morning and a duplicate was read from the platform at the opening exercises the rehearsal of "The Rose Jar" would be postponed for a day.

"What about Miss Haverstraw?" Janice demanded, meeting Linda in the hall before assembly.

"I telephoned her and she said she was glad we were putting it off a day," said Linda quietly.

Now Miss Haverstraw might have been glad, for various reasons, that a respite was offered her, but the members of the cast who were prepared for argument, felt decidedly disgruntled. They were ready to resign, or at least to make the threat, and it was disconcerting, to say the least, to be denied an opportunity to go into action. True, they might have resigned without waiting for a rehearsal, but Janice dearly loved a dramatic effect and she did not favor the idea of resigning off stage as it were.

Edith Groves sought Linda out at noon, her fair face flushed with excitement.

"Linda, what do you suppose I heard?" she cried. "Some of the girls are talking about resigning from the play because Nettie Small is in the cast!"

"Yes, I heard that," Linda agreed soberly.

"You did? When? Who told you? What are you going to do?——" Edith fired her volley of questions, without waiting for a reply.

"Why, I don't see that there is anything to be done," said Linda. "I am not going to put Brenda Harton in Nettie's place at this late date. Why didn't the girls say something before this?"

They were walking home to lunch and Edith stopped in the center of the sidewalk.

"It's a larger affair than they thought it would be at first," she confided wisely. "People are beginning to talk. We've sold more tickets than any class ever did before. Miss Bascom was saying the other day that she thought we could give it two nights, instead of only one. Well, all the mothers are waking up and Mrs. Harton is wild to have Brenda in it."

"And she has combed the list and discovered that Nettie is the one child who can be shoved out with no fuss to follow," said Linda. "If

Aunt Carol hadn't inherited Cousin Dorothea's money, I suppose Mrs. Harton would have tried to have Patty and David removed."

"She doesn't mean to be horrid," Edith urged. "She just wants to see Brenda in a green suit, prancing about on the stage. If the cast wasn't so large that it crowds the stage now, you could add her, just to keep the peace."

"A fine peace it would be," said Linda ironically. "If I added Brenda, twenty mothers would be on my neck in an instant, demanding that I add their cherubs. Nettie is going to stay—that's final."

There was news waiting Linda at Miss Gilly's lunch table. Mrs. Lawson had written from Texas, en route to California. She formally relinquished all claim to David and declared that she had written instructions to her sister to forward his clothes to Miss Gilly.

"As you know," the letter went on to say, "I have taken no legal action in the matter. You speak as though you wished to adopt the child and if you do, a burden will be lifted from my shoulders. He has been a constant disappointment to my husband and myself, and has shown himself absolutely without affection for either of us. Now that he has left our home and gone back to you, we could never feel the same toward him again."

The "constant disappointment" sat at the table, as Linda scanned the letter, one arm around the neck of Independence, the other busily plying his fork. He looked well and rosy and when Grandma Poore, on her way for more bread, patted his head, he grinned at her companionably.

The telephone rang as the children were washing their hands, preparatory to returning to school, and Linda answered it.

Patty, who possessed an intense curiosity about conversations in which she was not included, poked her head out of the bathroom and listened.

"It's Doctor Copely," she reported to David, who was brushing his hair in his own room.

"He wants her to go somewhere after school," went on Patty, as though she were translating a foreign language.

Then, as she heard the receiver click into place, she ran to the head of the stairs.

"Where are you going, Linda?" she called. "Take me with you?"

"Let me——" David tossed the brush on the bed and flew to the banisters. "Linda, let me go?"

Linda barely glanced at them, though ordinarily she gave them her closest attention.

"Where's Aunt Carol?" she demanded.

"Right here, dear——" Miss Gilly stepped out of the dining room.

"Aunt Carol, Doctor Copely wants me to go with him to the hospital this afternoon," said Linda hurriedly. "He says he'll pick me up at school. It's the county hospital between here and Standish. He says we'll be back by five o'clock."

"All right, dearie," said Miss Gilly placidly. "Mary will look after the children, and you mustn't feel hurried. I'm glad the rehearsal was postponed for it gives you a free afternoon."

Mary Rice did not come home for lunch and though Linda was ashamed of the feeling, she was always rather glad that this was the arrangement. Mary never seemed to contribute anything to the conversation and a constant effort had to be made to include her in the talk. No one wanted to shut her out, but she did not seem willing to meet them part way.

When Linda came out of school at three o'clock having determinedly side-stepped Janice and Estelle Carr who displayed an intention to corner her and bring up the subject of Nettie Small, she found the doctor's red roadster already at the curb.

"Thought maybe you'd been kept in," he greeted her, holding open the door.

Linda laughed and settled lightly into her

place. Patty and David and the faithful Buddy and Lucy, watching wistfully, waved farewell as the car shot up the street.

"Can't take them all," said Doctor Copely comfortably. "Anyway, this is a consultation and we don't want to be hampered in any way."

"A consultation?" echoed Linda. "Am I—do you——"

The doctor smiled and glanced at her mischievously.

"When a doctor gets to the place where he needs expert advice, he gets the best available," he informed her.

Linda was puzzled. She did not understand him at all.

"I can't make up my mind about a case," said the doctor gravely. "I think perhaps you can tell me what to do, so we're going out to the hospital to hold a consultation."

"I suppose you're teasing me," Linda declared resignedly. "But I don't care—I am having the nicest drive!"

They reached the large brick and sandstone building, before which was always a small brigade of automobiles. Doctor Copely parked on the drive, and helped Linda out. She felt curiously small as she went up the wide, shallow steps with him and stood in the immense square, bare hall.

"How do you do, Doctor," said a nurse in a white uniform. "Miss Gowan was asking for you, she's in Room 34."

"We'll go up," Doctor Copely answered. "Miss Shaw, this is Linda Lane, called into consultation."

Miss Shaw smiled, showing beautiful white teeth, and shook hands. Then Linda found herself following the doctor up dark, shining steps, that were speckless. She wondered how it was possible to keep any building in such a dustless state of perfection.

Room 34 proved to be on the third floor and at the end of a corridor. The doctor stopped when they reached the cream-colored door and tapped gently.

"All right," said a pleasant voice and some one stepped quickly to the door and flung it back.

Linda saw a tall, thin nurse, a bare, clean room, furnished simply with an iron hospital cot, a dresser and a couple of chairs. She saw this, but she remembered the details afterward. All her attention was centered on the baby who sat, fully dressed, in the center of the cot.

It was the most beautiful baby Linda had ever seen!

About two years old, Linda thought, with the bluest eyes, the most wonderful mass of soft,

silky, golden ringlets lying thickly on the exquisitely shaped little head, a beautiful, tiny mouth, rose-leaf complexion. Why just the kind of a baby to lose one's head over at the first glance.

Linda promptly lost hers.

"You adorable, sweet lamb!" she addressed the mite. "Why, you lovely crumb of sweetness, whose baby are you?"

She went over to the bed and knelt down, so that her face was on a level with the cherub's.

And that little creature smiled, a smile that crinkled the blue eyes and curled the pink mouth; the tiny hands reached out and touched Linda softly, patting her cheeks with all the force of snowflakes.

"I love you," cooed the baby.

"I'm afraid to hug her," said Linda simply. "I'd hurt her. She's too sweet to be true. And don't tell me I'm mixed—she *is* a girl, isn't she?"

"Certainly she is a girl," said the nurse proudly.

Linda refused a chair but the doctor sat down. The nurse leaned over the foot of the cot.

"There's your case, Linda," said the doctor quietly.

"Why, she isn't sick!" Linda's voice held alarm and protest. "A baby couldn't look as

lovely as that and be sick. What is the matter with her?"

"Oh, she's healthy enough," admitted Doctor Copely. "Poor mite, that's about all the Fates have done for her so far, started her off with a good constitution."

"And the disposition of an angel," the nurse reminded him. "I never saw a baby who could approach her for goodness, she has the sweetest temper and she smiles all day long."

"Miss Gowan has the babies' ward and she ought to know," said the doctor. "Stop flirting with me, you rascal."

The baby bestowed one of her sweetest smiles as an answer to this sally.

"But why is she in a hospital?" Linda protested. "Where is her mother, or her family?"

"Her mother died a week ago today," said the doctor sadly. "Pneumonia. The ambulance brought her in and they had to bring the baby, too, because there was no one to leave her with. As far as we have been able to find out, the child hasn't a living relative in this world."

Linda knew then why the nurse looked at the lovely baby with such pity in her tired, kind eyes.

"But what will become of her?" she asked, worriedly. "Isn't there anyone to take her and love her?"

"She'll have to be adopted," said Miss Gowan

shortly. "Not that there will be any trouble about that as a pretty baby is always snapped up."

Linda stroked the fine gold hair thoughtfully.

"What is her name?" she asked absently.

"Joy," said Doctor Copely somberly. "Her mother named her Joy."

CHAPTER XX

JOY INCARNATE

LINDA sat down on the cot and took the baby in her lap.

"Joy?" she said softly. "Joy?"

The baby laughed and burrowed her rose-leaf face in Linda's neck.

"Isn't she the sweetest!" cried the girl. "I never saw such a friendly baby. I wonder who will adopt her?"

Miss Gowan glanced at the Doctor significantly. She was overworked and her hard life had given her few luxuries, so what she said was all the more surprising if one understood her circumstances. Doctor Copely did, though Linda, of course, was ignorant.

"I can not stand it," declared Miss Gowan, "I simply can not stand it, if this baby goes to Mrs. Hartpence."

Linda, her arms around the adorable scrap of sunshine, asked who Mrs. Hartpence might be.

"You tell her, Miss Gowan," said Doctor Copely lazily.

"Well, I will," said the nurse. "Mrs. Hartpence has had an application in for some time, she wants a baby for adoption. It must be pretty, must be a girl, and must have blue eyes and naturally curly hair."

Involuntarily Linda hugged Joy tighter, she met those requirements.

"Mrs. Hartpence," went on the nurse, "can't begin to spend her income, and offers a pretty, blue-eyed, curly-haired girl baby, a magnificent home, with a staff of trained baby nurses, a suite of rooms to herself and, as the child grows up, every educational advantage."

"And Miss Gowan wanted to hide Joy the moment she laid eyes on her," put in Doctor Copely. "I do believe she has kept the child in her room nights for fear one of the other nurses might see her and tell Mrs. Hartpence."

"Don't you want her to be adopted?" smiled Linda, over the golden curls on which her chin rested.

"Of course I want her adopted—but not into a mausoleum," Miss Gowan retorted. "What chance has a baby like this to be happy in a great tomb like the Hartpence house? She'll have everything done for her and everything given her, except a normal family life with plenty of love. She'll grow up to be beautiful, perhaps, and silly and selfish and vain for there will be no

one to teach her anything else. All Mrs. Hartpence demands in the baby she is willing to adopt, is good looks. How do I know she won't ship Joy to Africa, if she turns out to be a homely girl?"

They laughed at her vehemence and the doctor suggested that she had first said Joy was going to grow up to be a beauty.

"Wouldn't you want her to have any money?" asked Linda curiously.

"I'd rather she had too little than too much," the nurse returned. "I've seen wealthy families and I've seen poor families. I've nursed in both and in homes where the income fell between, and nowhere have I seen the wretched unhappiness and discontent and failures among the children that I've seen in the homes of the rich. Usually there is one child, perhaps two, and they grow up unspeakably selfish. If I ever had a daughter and had to die and leave her, I would want her to be taken into a home of moderate means where there were other children."

"Miss Gowan wants you and Miss Gilly to take Joy, Linda," the doctor announced quietly.

Involuntarily again Linda hugged the baby to her. To have that bewitching little creature for her own! why, a baby in the house would be wonderful! Patty objected to being called a baby and she was never overly demonstrative.

"You see, Doctor Copely told me once about you," said Miss Gowan, who was as direct in her speech as in her thinking. "I've always admired you tremendously. You didn't ask for pretty children, or blue-eyed children, you didn't pay any attention to their looks, but when a child needed helping, you took him in."

"It isn't I," protested Linda, the color flooding her face at this praise of herself. "Aunt Carol does it all. I'm adopted myself, you know."

"Yes, I know," the nurse answered, "but you are the one who first thought of building up a family. Your aunt is pure gold to use her money as she does, but she would never have taken in Patty and David if it hadn't been for you. And Grandma Poore and Mary Rice, they belong to the 'family,' because it is your idea. That's the kind of a home I want little Joy to have."

Linda looked accusingly at Doctor Copely who did not seem at all disconcerted.

"Certainly I talk about you, Linda Lane," he declared coolly. "When I meet a girl with ideas and the brains to carry them out, I usually mention her. And the moment we began to discuss plans for having this baby adopted, up pipes Miss Gowan with, 'Can't you persuade that nice Linda Lane to take her, doctor? That girl has

sense and she loves children and the baby will be safe with her.' "

"But—our house, you know——" Linda faltered, visions of the Hartpence mansion floating through her mind.

She dimly remembered seeing pictures of the Hartpence summer home and the Hartpence shore villa and the Hartpence shooting lodge, in some of the Sunday supplements. If Joy was adopted by Mrs. Hartpence she would have a choice of several homes from the beginning.

"We live very plainly," said Linda bravely. "Aunt Carol hasn't a large fortune, though if she kept it for herself she could have almost everything she wanted. But she tries to live on her interest now and Patty and David go to public school. Would it be fair to Joy to make her share with the three of us who are already there?"

"Would it be fair to her to turn her over to be completely spoiled and grow up with an exaggerated idea of her own importance?" Miss Gowan demanded.

"Look here, Linda," suddenly said the doctor who had been watching the girl and the baby on the bed. "Can you put that baby down and say good-by to her and walk away? Shall I telephone Mrs. Hartpence to come out and see her?"

To his surprise and Linda's, too, a rush of tears answered him.

"She's so lovely," sobbed Linda. "She is beautiful, a perfect baby. And there isn't any duty to be done, if Aunt Carol adopts her; I just want her because she is so sweet."

Man-like the doctor couldn't puzzle this out. It was Miss Gowan who understood.

"Once in a lifetime, Linda Lane," she said tersely, "you'll find your duty coincides with what you want to do more than anything else in the world. This is that one time."

The baby climbed to a standing position in Linda's lap.

"Lin-da!" she breathed softly.

Linda's arms went around her possessively. Miss Gowan had guessed what she had never put into words, even to herself. David and Patty and Mary Rice all asked of her more than they gave, unconsciously, of course. They loved her, at least the children did and she hoped Mary liked her, but they hurt her, too, and worried her. David was so silent one could never be sure what he was thinking or planning. Patty and her temper managed to upset the house with fair frequency. Mary Rice was determined to do her duty but nothing more.

And here was Joy—a Joy incarnate, bright and beautiful and brimming over with love for

all the world. Linda knew what a sensation she would give Morrisville, the people who had asked "Why?" when Miss Gilly adopted Linda, who asked "Why?" when David came to the little brown house to live, and "Why?" again when Patty joined the circle. The townfolk couldn't see why Mary Rice didn't leave school and go to work and they wondered if Grandma Poore did enough work to pay for her board. These curious and rather shrill-tongued questioners would not hurl their speculations at Joy. They might ask why, but it would be "Why didn't you let me know there was a baby like that offered for adoption?" As Miss Gowan had observed, a pretty baby had little trouble in finding a home.

"Aunt Carol will say take her, I know she will," said Linda. "When can we bring her over to see Joy, Doctor?"

"Well, Linda, we might as well confess that this is a deep, dark plan Miss Gowan and I have cooked up," he answered her. "Mrs. Hartpence is coming to-morrow, to visit the hospital. She has endowed a ward and she often comes to look us over, and Miss Gowan was afraid to have her see Joy."

"We'll take her away now, this minute," Linda announced excitedly. "You 'tend to all the rules and regulations, Doctor Copely, and

I'll undertake to convince Aunt Carol. Has she a coat and a cap to wear?"

"She certainly has, and I'll go get them," said Miss Gowan, whisking out of the room silently on her rubber-soled shoes.

While she was gone the doctor told Linda that the nurses had spent their spare time for the last four days, making clothes for the baby.

"I never saw them so wild over a child before," he confided. "But she is a bonny youngster, isn't she?"

Linda only knew that she had never seen a baby like her. Neither, it developed, had the nurses, who crowded the upper windows of the hospital to see Joy go off in the doctor's car. In her white coat and cap, with a gold ring of hair waving above each ear, she looked like a birthday cake and candles and whipped cream and a pink rose all rolled into one—as a young nurse, frantically trying to do her justice, remarked rather incoherently.

Joy liked automobiling. She liked everything. She beamed from the moment they started and she was still beaming when they reached Morrisville. She had had her nap before Linda came to the hospital, so the blue eyes were not drowsy and it was a wide-awake baby who crowed with delight when Independence came frisking down the garden path.

Linda had spoken to the doctor about her care, on the way over, and he had told her that the child was practically in perfect physical condition.

"Her mother was evidently a very sensible woman," the doctor said. "The child is well developed and nourished. I will give you diet lists and I'll keep an eye on her, but she has been well-trained and you'll have no bad habits to correct."

He stopped the car at the curb and Independence, as was his custom, put his forefeet on the door and looked in.

"Dog!" said Joy fearlessly.

"You'll come in, too, won't you?" Linda suggested a little nervously.

"Of course I'll come in," said the doctor, smiling. "You don't think I mean to let you stagger into the house with a strange baby and a suitcase of her belongings and all explanations still to be made? Let me take her."

He picked up Joy, swung the little wicker suit case, which held all of her earthly possessions, free of the car and tramped up the walk, Linda hurrying ahead.

"Linda—what's that?"——it was Mrs. Hampton.

"Hurry!" commanded Linda fiercely. "I

will *not* have her find everything out before Aunt Carol has a chance."

Doctor Copely chuckled, but obediently quickened his step. Linda knew the latch was off and she pushed open the door without ringing the bell. The small hall gave a view of the living room and they were all there. Grandma Poore was knitting placidly, Miss Gilly basting a sleeve, Mary, near the side window, reading aloud to Patty and David. Independence, tagging at Linda's heels, gave a bark. He sensed her excitement and in his own way he wanted to make people pay attention to her.

"Linda Lane!" said Grandma Poore.

"Why, it's Doctor Copely!" Miss Gilly exclaimed.

And Joy, suddenly shy before so many new faces, turned and buried her face against Linda's coat.

CHAPTER XXI

ADD A BABY SISTER

Linda walked straight to Miss Gilly and put the baby gently down on her lap.

And that amazing mite, overwhelmed with shyness a moment before, lifted fat, dimpled arms above her curly head, stretched luxuriously and yawned. Then she toppled over against Miss Gilly and lay smiling placidly at her assembled audience.

"Oh, you lamb!" breathed Miss Gilly rapturously. "Whose baby are you? Linda, she is beautiful!"

Grandma Poore pushed up her spectacles and took possession of the chair Doctor Copely placed for her, next to Miss Gilly. Patty and David and Mary Rice knelt in a circle and Linda stood in the center of the floor, the logical point for a speech-maker.

"What's her name?" this from David.

"Joy," said Linda—"Joy, say 'David.'"

Joy did better than that. She gurgled and leaning forward, kissed David helter-skelter on

his chin. He liked it and Linda was surprised to see how pleased he was.

"How old is she?" asked Patty.

"Just half as old as you are," Linda answered. "Two years old, Patty."

Patty looked at the baby whose blue eyes noticed the little chain of beads she wore.

"You can have them," said Patty, though up to that moment they had been her dearest possession and she had slapped Lucy Hampton violently the day before for suggesting that they "trade" beads.

Patty unfastened the little chain of blue beads and put them on Joy, and the baby smiled her charming smile.

"Say, she's nice, isn't she?" said Mary Rice, quite as though she had made a discovery. "I like a nice, clean baby. Somebody takes good care of her, you can see that."

Miss Gilly and Grandma Poore looked expectantly at Linda.

"Could we—could we——" Linda choked a little, "Aunt Carol, could we keep her?" she brought out with a rush.

Miss Gilly did not seem surprised. She listened quietly while Doctor Copely told of the baby's mother and why she was to be offered for adoption. And Grandma Poore nodded approvingly when he explained why he wanted the

child to be brought up in a home where there were other children and not too much money.

"If you decide not to keep Joy, there will be no difficulty about placing her," he finished simply. "And if you do want her, I will be on hand to speed the legal formalities."

Then little Miss Gilly looked around the circle of interested faces and spoke characteristically.

"I must ask my family," she said softly and Mary Rice flushed gratefully, for she was included in that affectionate glance.

"If this lovely baby comes to live with us," went on Miss Gilly, "we'll all have to help her grow up. A baby, you know, isn't just a large doll to play with. We'll all have more to do—Grandma and Mary, especially. I'm afraid Linda and Mary will have to look after her nights, and Patty and David will have to be ready to amuse her sometimes, when perhaps they would rather play."

Linda had thought about Patty and David on the drive home. They were inclined to be a little selfish, Patty especially. A baby might easily arouse small jealousies. Linda had heard of older children bitterly resenting the arrival of a new brother or sister who took the mother's attention, and so it seemed to them, all her love.

"Joy can sleep in my bed," announced Patty shrilly.

"She can have my brown cup with the cow on it," David offered his choicest bit of china.

"You could put a crib in our room and Linda and I would hear her if she cried in the night," said Mary absently, staring at the baby as though she were hypnotized.

"Then," suggested Miss Gilly, "you think we'd better keep her? I don't ask Linda, because Linda would say 'yes,' if seven babies came to live with us. What do you think, Emily?"

Grandma Poore smiled.

"I was just thinking that if you don't let me hold that baby a few minutes, I'll go crazy," she said. "I haven't had a baby in my arms for years."

Miss Gilly gave Joy to her and she and Linda walked to the door with the doctor who appeared to be satisfied with his call.

"You knew it would be like this," said Linda.

"Well, that's the finest baby I've seen in my years of practice," declared Doctor Copely, "and this is the one home I'd be satisfied to place her in. Call it a hunch, if you like, but it seemed to me I ought to at least try to bring this about."

"We need a baby in the house," Miss Gilly said, her arm around Linda.

When the doctor had driven away, they went back to the living room.

"Listen!" whispered Linda.

Grandma Poore was singing softly, an old nursery rhyme about "The Frog He Would A-Wooing Go," and Joy sat on her lap, beating time with her dimpled hands. Patty and David sat cross-legged on the floor, listening, and Mary was on the floor, too, leaning against Grandma's knee.

"Bless their hearts!" said Miss Gilly. "The children love her already!"

Joy's supper that night was superintended by an adoring circle. Just to see the baby eat bread and milk seemed to fascinate them. There was no crib, of course, and it was decided that Mary should sleep with Linda, and that her bed, pushed against the wall and barricaded with chairs and pillows, would make a safe place for the baby to sleep. Patty and David wanted her to sleep with them and Miss Gilly said she knew she wouldn't be disturbed if Joy's bed were moved into her room, while Grandma Poore declared that some one with experience would be of help in case the baby cried in the night. The truth was, each one wanted to keep that golden head in sight for there was something about the child each one found irresistible.

Joy ate her supper and went to sleep with a suddenness that surprised Linda and alarmed

Patty and David, until Grandma Poore explained that babies often went to sleep like that. Mary had taken care of three babies in her home and to her was intrusted the task of undressing Joy without awakening her. She was obviously proud and she accomplished the feat deftly and quickly. They found a little nightgown in the suit case and presently the baby was tucked away and Patty and David dragged out of the room. Left to themselves they would have slept on the floor, Linda was sure.

Linda and Mary slept like the healthy tired girls they were and not a sound disturbed them in the night. Early the next morning a little gurgle woke Linda. She was puzzled, what could the noise be? Another gurgle, and she remembered Joy. She sat up with a jerk and across the room saw a pair of wide-open blue eyes surveying her gravely.

"Lin-dah!" murmured Joy sweetly.

Mary sat up in bed. "Hello!" she said abruptly.

Joy wrinkled her forehead, under its mass of golden curls and so patently tried to remember Mary, that both girls laughed.

"Say Mary Rice," Mary commanded.

She had rather an unfortunate manner, without in the least meaning to be brusque. It was

partly shyness and partly lack of a gracious home training.

"Mary Wice," gurgled Joy in triumph.

"Linda—can we come in? Is the baby awake? Linda, is she laughing?" came a chorus outside the door.

"Come in!" Linda called and Patty and David burst into the room like twin tornadoes.

"Say 'Patty'," Patty begged, and David chimed in. "Say 'David', Joy—say 'David'."

Joy studied them silently for a minute. Then her face broke into smiles and she held out her arms.

"Milk!" she said blissfully.

The children fell on her with squeals of laughter, but Linda saw that they were careful not to hurt her. There was something in Patty's face that had not been there before—a new gentleness. She was such a little girl herself, that when she put her arms around the baby and kissed her softly, Linda felt a lump rising in her throat.

"Children can be so *dear!*" she thought, as she turned away to dress.

It was a hilarious process—that getting ready for breakfast. Patty and David kept interrupting their progress to peep in and say "Hello, Joy" to the baby who always gurgled her entrancing laugh and said "Hello" in re-

turn. Mary and Linda spent more time dressing Joy than they did themselves, though she was to have her bath later in the morning after the first rush of the morning was over. Linda curled half the golden curls on the pretty head, and Mary curled the other half and Joy sat on the chair where they placed her and talked to Patty's toy rabbit patiently.

When they brought her downstairs, she was radiant and greeted the sight of the breakfast table with a ringing cry of "Milk!" Independence circled around her, barking madly and David and Patty quarreled as to where she was to sit.

"If you are good and don't fuss," said Grandma Poore, "I'll take you uptown with me to-night to buy Joy a high chair and a stroller."

"Not to-night, not after school," Patty wailed in anguish. "We have to go to the rehearsal, Grandma."

"Well, I'll wait till to-morrow, then," promised Grandma.

"Let me wheel her in the stroller?" Patty asked shrewdly.

But David was a close second.

"I'm older than you are," he said. "I'm going to wheel Joy."

"You'd better be extra nice to Mary," de-

clared Miss Gilly pointedly. "She will have charge of the stroller most of the time."

Mary smiled when both children flung themselves upon her, begging to be allowed to "push Joy."

"I'll see," was all she would say.

No one wanted to start for school that morning. Joy, exploring the rooms of her new home, was the anchor, and finally Linda had to herd Patty and David through the door and guide them as they walked backward, waving to the baby in Grandma Poore's arms.

Mary glanced over her shoulder as they turned the corner.

"Mrs. Hampton is just going in," she announced. "I suppose she will have a fit when she hears your aunt is going to adopt another child."

"Perhaps," said Linda absently.

She was already thinking of the postponed rehearsal to be held that afternoon.

CHAPTER XXII

MORE DIFFERENCES

THERE was a little undercurrent of excitement throughout school that morning. Linda, infinitely sensitive, felt it. The rehearsal was on everyone's mind and Edith Groves whispered to Linda that she "had heard" the committees were to attend, too.

"Jimmie Andrews is going to stay," added Edith.

Linda found this comforting. She did not yet know to what extent the dissatisfaction had spread, though there were a dozen loyal friends she could count on, no matter what arguments might be raised. Edith Groves, Helen Ware, Agnes Moffatt—well, perhaps not Agnes; one could not always be sure what Agnes would do. But Willard Marsh, his brother, Blake, the entire committee under Fred Vaney, these she knew would be "bitter enders" with her.

"I should like to remark that if there is much more inattention on the part of this class," said

the long-suffering teacher, "there may be no rehearsal this afternoon for lack of a cast."

Linda came back to matters more closely in hand and applied herself with such good concentration that the quarter of twelve gong made her jump nervously.

She and Patty and David actually ran all the way home to lunch, bursting in, warm and breathless, eager for a sight of Joy.

"She's asleep," said Miss Gilly. "Babies need long naps, you know. Doctor Copely came in while we were giving her her bath and she offered him the soap as a present. He said she has been sensibly trained and no one needs to tiptoe about or speak in whispers while she is asleep. Only, of course, we don't want to make any unnecessary noise."

Patty and David looked so disappointed—it had never occurred to them that Joy would need more sleep than one enjoyed during the night—that Linda promised them a peep at her, if they would eat lunch quietly and be extra careful about the clean cloth.

"We have to set the baby a good example," explained Linda seriously. "She will model her table manners on ours, so we'll have to be polite always, and not just on Sunday mornings."

The children giggled, this they knew, was Linda's joke. They meant to be polite every

morning, but it did seem fatally easy to forget and drop buttered knives and tip over tricky glasses of milk.

After lunch they went upstairs and Linda let them look into her room where a fluff of yellow curls showed that the little blue hill on the bed must be the sleeping Joy.

"To-morrow," said Grandma Poore, who had followed them, "we'll get her a crib, and a stroller and a high chair. It will seem like living to have a baby in the house."

The homely little phrase found an echo in Linda's mind. A baby in the house did make a difference. David now went downstairs to wait for her, quietly, instead of leaping down three steps at a time and giving a whoop as he landed in the hall.

Patty followed Linda into the bathroom to wash her hands.

"Say, Linda," she began, shyly.

"Yes?" said Linda encouragingly.

Patty's beautiful hair was rumpled and her dark blue eyes gleamed with excitement. She looked so exactly what she was, a little girl struggling with a big idea, that Linda could not help smiling.

"Yes, dear?" she said again.

She had discovered that the undemonstrative Patty craved spoken words of affection.

David, too, outwardly so self-contained and sufficient, responded instantly to "dear." That little word might be often misused, but Linda shrewdly suspected that children like David and Patty would never be surfeited with it. They had too long missed it.

"I just thought," Patty brought out, coming close to Linda and whispering. "I just thought, Linda, why couldn't Joy be the baby in 'The Rose Jar'?"

Linda kissed her on her round, white chin.

"Honey, that is a very fine idea," she said gratefully, "and Joy would look sweet enough to eat, when the princess takes the cover off the jar. But we mustn't suggest such a thing, you see there are practically five of us in the cast now."

"You're doing all the work," declared Patty, with a wisdom beyond her years, "and David's an elf and I'm an elf; Buddy and Lucy Hampton don't count, because they don't live in our house."

"Well, they do, to all intents and purposes," Linda giggled. "Anyway, they're our friends and I recommended them for elves. I can not suggest another name—not one. We'll have to keep Joy for ourselves."

Patty seemed disappointed. Linda would have been surprised at her evident depth of feel-

ing, if she had not known how seriously small children take their little griefs. Patty would be smiling as soon as something rubbed this idea from her mind; but just now nothing seemed to matter to her, if Joy couldn't be the Rose Jar baby.

Linda peeped at the baby, saw she was still sleeping, and went down followed by Patty, to start the walk back to school. On the front porch she found Mrs. Hampton and her children in conversation with David.

"Well, Linda, I see you're bound to kill Carol Gilly," said Mrs. Hampton, who was not noted for cheerful speech.

"Have you seen Joy?" Linda asked radiantly. "Isn't she beautiful?"

"Hump! Pretty is, as pretty does," said Mrs. Hampton sententiously. "I should say you could stand a little beauty—Patty's looks are nothing to boast of. I brought Buddy and Lucy over early to see the baby, but David tells me she is asleep."

"Come over this afternoon, Aunt Carol will love to show her off," Linda suggested.

Then she remembered that Buddy and Lucy would be at the rehearsal.

"I forgot the children will have to stay at school," she said. "Well, they will have dozens of chances to see Joy. It isn't as though she

were on a visit. She's going to live here."

"I think some one ought to be appointed to look after Carol Gilly," Mrs. Hampton announced heavily. "She's losing her mind and you twist her around your little finger."

"We'll be late, if we don't hurry," urged Buddy, and Linda welcomed the interruption.

The two boys and Lucy walked ahead, but Patty kept step with Linda.

"Aren't my looks anything to boast of?" she inquired anxiously as soon as they were out of earshot of the house.

"You monkey you never miss anything, do you?" Linda groaned. "Why, I don't want to make you vain, Patty, and neither does Mrs. Hampton; but I don't mind telling you, you have magnificent hair, and if you brush it and take care of it, you'll have that to boast of, some day."

"But not now?" hinted Patty.

"Not now," said Linda firmly. "It doesn't matter so much how little girls look but when you are twenty, you begin to wonder if you'll do."

Patty was perfectly satisfied with this argument and Linda thought that it had driven the idea of Joy as the Rose Jar baby from the busy little mind. It was not always easy to switch Patty's train of thought, but Linda assured herself that she had succeeded this time.

The moment the dismissal gong sounded, at the close of the afternoon session, the eighth graders, and all who could by any stretch of the imagination be said to have connection with the production of the play, streamed into the auditorium.

Miss Haverstraw was already on the platform and Janice was talking to her when Linda came in.

"Whatever happens, keep your temper," said Jimmie Andrews, squeezing past her to get to his favorite vantage point near the stage.

The boys involuntarily strayed to a block of seats on one side of the hall and the girls to another section. They could work together amiably enough, but each seemed to derive confidence and support in larger measure, when wedged into a mass formation of his or her own kind.

"Before we call the rehearsal," said Miss Haverstraw, stepping to the edge of the platform, "there seems to be one or two points of difference that we'd better settle. As a rule, I refuse to listen to squabbles, but since Mr. Watts has asked me to intervene, I can not very well ignore the trouble."

Linda flashed Jimmie an inquiring look. He nodded slightly. So they had gone to the principal with never a word to her! It wasn't

fair, thought Linda passionately, to prepare their argument and leave her in the dark. If Jimmie had not warned her, she would not have known what was being planned.

"The art committee is tearing its collective hair," Miss Haverstraw was saying, "over what I must say seems to me a trivial matter; as you know in the last act, a bird is seen to flutter down and alight on the rose jar. This is a sign, a symbol. And Blake and Estelle can not seem to come to a decision as to what the bird shall be."

"I'll be darned——" sputtered Blake rising hastily.

Miss Haverstraw glanced at him coolly.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said meekly.

"Estelle?" the coach questioned in her even tones.

"I have a perfectly lovely bird," said Estelle crossly. "It looks alive. And I want it lowered on a wire—its wings are jointed and it is really wonderful."

Blake looked to be in such agony that Miss Haverstraw took pity on him. At her nod, he burst out.

"It's an owl!" he shouted and the hall rocked with laughter at the burning contempt in his voice.

"It's a stuffed owl and moth-eaten at that.

Every time you touch it, a handful of feathers drops out. Who wants a feather bed descending from the ceiling to make folks sneeze?"

Miss Haverstraw coughed.

"We'll come back to this later," she decided. "I think, myself, the directions stipulate a black raven. However, I want to take up the question of substituting another child for one of the elves."

She looked directly at Linda, who came forward to the stage.

"I am not willing," she said clearly, "to substitute one child for another. I prefer to make no changes in the cast. That is, if I am asked."

Miss Haverstraw bit her pencil.

"Have you discussed this matter with anyone, Linda?" she asked.

"No one has come to me," said Linda. "I have heard that there is some—dissatisfaction."

"You know the names submitted?" Miss Haverstraw suggested.

From where she stood, Linda could see Nettie Small's happy little face. The child was waiting eagerly for the time when the "elf song" would summon her to take her part on the stage.

"Yes, I know the names mentioned," said Linda. "I think the suggestion is absolutely unjust. Unjust in every way."

"I have a list of twenty names," Miss Haver-

straw announced, "representing those who stand ready to withdraw, if the change is not made. I'm interested in seeing the play go on, naturally, to have it collapse now, would bring more notoriety than if you yielded to this suggestion, Linda."

"I can't," said Linda, "but of course I can resign, too."

Jimmie Andrews stood up suddenly, smiling good-temperedly.

"Patty has a good idea, Linda," he said boyishly.

CHAPTER XXIII

EVERYBODY PLEASED

Linda regarded Patty with mingled emotions, in which apprehension threatened to prevail. One never knew just what Patty, undirected, would do. Even when supervised, she was capable of astounding feats.

"And what is your plan, Patty?" said Miss Haverstraw.

She, thought Linda, did not have to be responsible for the plan, whatever it might prove to be.

Jimmie gently pushed Patty forward and she stopped at the edge of the platform, keeping her intent gaze on Linda.

"You know you said," she began in her clear treble, "you know you said, Linda, that the reason Joy couldn't be the rose jar baby was that we have too many children from our house in the play."

Linda flushed, but nodded gravely.

"Well," said Patty, while the audience listened with almost painful attention, "if you'll

let Joy be the Rose Jar baby, some one else can be an elf in my place."

When Patty was "worked up," as Mrs. Hampton expressed it, her face grew very white and her freckles stood out with startling distinctness. Linda saw the little gold dots now, but she did not think of freckles. Patty's dark blue eyes were looking at her with all the child's heart in them. Patty was making her first sacrifice and giving up her part in the play for Joy. Linda knew something of what the play ment to Patty. She adored the music and the dancing and not to be on the stage when the town hall was filled for the eventful night would mean deep disappointment for the little elf.

"I don't know what good that would do," said Linda slowly, speaking more to herself than to Miss Haverstraw.

"Well, why not?" the coach countered.

Linda hesitated. She couldn't exactly put the bald fact into the words that what Janice wanted was to withdraw Nettie Small from the cast. However, Miss Haverstraw seemed to guess her thoughts, teachers have such an uncanny way of knowing more than their pupils give them credit for. As far as Linda knew, not a word had ever been said to Miss Haverstraw about Nettie and her unfortunate father, and as the coach lived outside of Morrisville, it

was not likely that she had heard the story elsewhere. Yet, in her next sentence, she betrayed such a comprehensive grasp of the state of affairs, that Linda could only stare at her, bewildered.

"If Patty is willing to give up her place, and Brenda Harton is substituted for her, will that please you, Janice?" said Miss Haverstraw.

Then, in a quick aside to Linda, she breathed, "It won't, but she hasn't the effrontery to stand out against us further."

Janice did not appear to be pleased, but Linda was never able to decide whether she had wanted Brenda to take part in the play, or had counted on forcing Nettie out, or whether both motives were blended in her attack. As Miss Haverstraw had foreseen, Janice did not dare to hold out for Nettie's withdrawal.

"It's all right, if Brenda plays an elf," she said sulkily. "She is a more suitable type than Patty, anyone would say that."

Jimmie wanted to laugh, Linda could tell that by the way his lips twitched, and she felt like giggling herself. Brenda was fat and clumsy and about as graceful as a puppy and Janice would certainly have to make her a special suit. She could never wear the slim little green garments that had been fitted to Patty.

"But what is this about a baby?" said Miss Haverstraw.

Linda smiled, what about the baby indeed?

"She is lovely," she answered simply. "Her name is Joy. But I don't know whether she could be the Rose Jar baby or not."

"You children have your hearts set on an actual baby in that last scene and I suppose I might as well capitulate," the coach said resignedly. "Though, of course, we'll have to see how things go at rehearsal."

"I can go home and get Joy now," suggested Patty.

Miss Haverstraw laughed.

"If the baby isn't to arrive in pieces, I think we'd better intrust that errand to Linda," she returned. "Could you bring her here this afternoon, Linda? I mean, would the excitement upset her?"

"Oh, no, she'll love it," declared Linda. "I'll go home and get her now. Patty, you come help me."

The news of Joy's arrival had not spread through Morrisville—give it time! said Grandma Poore—and the rehearsal went forward with added impetus, because the element of surprise had been added. The dark and the light-haired dolls had been generally voted "dumb-looking" and every member of the cast sighed

for a flesh-and-blood baby to dazzle the audience in the final tableau.

As Linda hurried home, Patty trotting beside her, she remembered that not even Jimmie had seen Joy. Then, glancing at the bobbing red head so near her elbow, she wondered what Patty's thoughts were.

"Patty," she said seriously, "you're as sweet as you can be, to give up your place, so Joy could be in the play. You love her, don't you, dear?"

The dark blue eyes said "yes" silently.

"You're sure you won't be sorry?" Linda persisted. "I wish there was room for all the children who want to sing, but there never is room in any play for an entire school."

"I'll take care of Aunt Carol and Grandma," said Patty sturdily.

Linda stooped down and kissed her. Patty was not only giving her place willingly, she was giving it cheerfully.

They found Joy, freshly awakened from a nap and dressed in a clean white dress, her shining curls in perfect order. She was delighted to see them and let them know it, gurgling and chuckling and bouncing up and down in an ecstasy that was distinctly flattering.

Linda explained to Miss Gilly, and, since that dear lady had the gift of understanding, in a

very few minutes, Joy in a white coat and cap, was on her way to school in Linda's arms, Patty gamboling before them like a happy kitten.

"Yes, precious, I know you can walk, but you don't walk very fast," said Linda, as Joy struggled to get down, "we're in a hurry —be a lamb, and you may walk all the way home."

So Joy consented to be a lamb, never a difficult rôle for her, for she instinctively tried to please those she loved, and presently they were going through the corridor, around the hall, to the back entrance of the auditorium.

The elves were singing their chorus and the music entranced the baby immediately she clapped her hands and her blue eyes danced; never had she heard such lovely sounds.

"Is that the baby?" Linda started for she had not heard Jimmie come up behind her.

"This is Joy," and Linda swept off the white cap, so that the curls fell in a golden shower over the white forehead.

"Well—you—you—say, Linda, she's pretty, isn't she?"

Linda laughed. Jimmie was staring at Joy and his words sounded lame indeed, if you saw the expression on his face.

The music stopped and Linda went up the

steps to the platform. Miss Haverstraw saw her first.

"Let me take her," she cried impulsively.

She held out her arms to Joy and the baby, who had known friendliness all her short life, put out her own hands with a crowing little laugh. Everyone heard that baby laugh and they flocked around her.

"Don't crush! Isn't she a raving, tearing beauty?" demanded the coach, with more enthusiasm than she had shown during any of the previous rehearsals. "Isn't she a dream? Linda Lane, where did you ever find her?"

Linda smiled, but did not reply directly. Joy, held high, smiled contentedly at them all. Without warning she began to hum, in a funny little voice, and to keep time with her hands.

"She likes it—play something for her," commanded half a dozen.

Obediently the teacher at the piano swept into the elf song and the children sang the chorus. Blake Marshall and Jimmie, after a hurried conference, went out and returned with the "rose jar" which at this stage was merely a framework. They lifted it to the table, Janice hurriedly threw over it a piece of pink sateen, and Miss Haverstraw gently lowered Joy into it.

"You're to hide," she told the baby. "Stay

there till some one comes and tells you to jump up."

Linda wasn't sure Joy understood, but she remained perfectly quiet till, at the proper cue, Edith Groves walked over to the jar and, under pretence of taking off the cover, whispered, "Stand up, darling."

Up popped the golden head, laughter brimmed in the blue eyes, and Joy held out her arms.

"That settles it—no dolls for us," said Jimmie in an aside to Linda and his prophecy proved to be correct.

Brenda Harton was fitted with difficulty, into the elf suit made for Patty, and Joy was accepted as the "rose jar baby." Within a few days Morrisville knew that Miss Gilly had taken another child into her home, but for once there was little criticism. No one, as far as Linda heard, asked "Why," once they had seen Joy. In fact half a dozen women came to her and offered to adopt the baby, "and give her every advantage, it seems a shame such a lovely baby should have to share everything with so many other children."

And to such remarks Doctor Copely merely said "Hump," while Miss Gilly smiled and said nothing. Linda and Mary and David and Patty were indignant enough, she declared, to make up for her silence.

"The Rose Jar" was a great success. From the moment of Joy's entrance into the cast, the rehearsals went with more snap and smoothness. Small bickerings died down and even the artistic committee members managed to settle their differences amiably. The stuffed owl, Estelle agreed, was "shedding" too abundantly to be considered, and she agreed to the substitution of a plaster of Paris bluebird. So many tickets were sold that it was decided to give the play two nights, instead of the one originally planned for, and the class had the intoxicating experience of knowing in advance that they would clear enough to enable them to buy a handsome gift for the school.

"What do you know," said Mary to Linda, a few nights before the first performance, "every one of the tucks in the dress Janice made for Joy, has been put in by hand. It's a sight of work and she did it all herself."

"Yes, I saw it," Linda nodded. "Janice told me that if she had her way, nothing would go on the dress but real lace, and we almost had a quarrel then and there over the probable cost. But Janice is crazy about Joy."

"So's everyone," observed Mary laconically.

And if Joy had been easily spoiled, she would have become unmanageable soon. But her sweet temper never failed her, she ate and slept

and laughed and played like the healthy atom she was, and as Miss Gilly gratefully declared, never gave her a moment's anxiety.

But if Joy was the sunshine of the house, the other members of "Linda's Family" were not so dependable. From Mary to Patty, they offered plenty of contrasts and changes and Linda was often to be at her wits' end to decide wisely. But there was gentle Miss Gilly and sensible Grandma Poore and somehow the tangles were smoothed out. What Linda accomplished and how she did it, will be told in another book, to be called "LINDA LANE'S PROBLEMS."

THE END

LINDA LANE SERIES

By Josephine Lawrence

For Girls from 12 to 15

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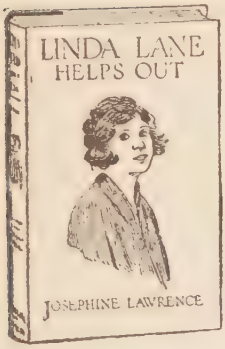

"The trouble with Linda Lane," said Mrs. Quincy, "was that she 'couldn't get along with folks.'" As everyone knows, a girl needs friends to lover her and believe in her. It isn't to be wondered at that Linda wasn't happy. Then little Miss Gilly came to the rooms of the Society, the only home Linda knew, and took the girl home with her. A new life begins for Linda, and she finds, to her surprise and delight, how to get along with people, how to make friends, and slowly and surely how to be happy.

Linda admires independence above all other traits of character. She has plenty of that quality herself and she is the kind of girl who not only cheerfully fights her own battles, but those of the weaker who cannot defend themselves. She is "bossy," lovable, impatient and loyal, a born manager, whose plans invariably work out to satisfactory conclusions, and Linda has a definite plan which gradually unfolds in these books written about her—the sort of plan only a girl without a home and parents of her own could think of and carry to completion. Linda Lane knows what she wants and she is willing to work and trust to her own efforts to make her wishes come true.

1. **LINDA LANE.**
2. **LINDA LANE HELPS OUT.**
3. **LINDA LANE'S PLAN.**
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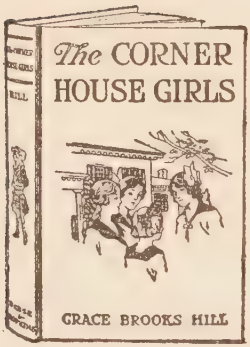
CHARMING STORIES FOR GIRLS

The Corner House Girls Series

By GRACE BROOKS HILL



Four girls from eight to fourteen years of age receive word that a rich bachelor uncle has died, leaving them the old Corner House he occupied. They move into it and then the fun begins. What they find and do will provoke many a hearty laugh. Later, they enter school and make many friends. One of these invites the girls to spend a few weeks at a bungalow owned by her parents, and the adventures they meet with make very interesting reading. Clean, wholesome stories of humor and adventure, sure to appeal to all young girls.

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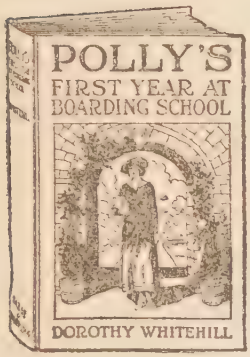

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By Eleanore Myers Jewett

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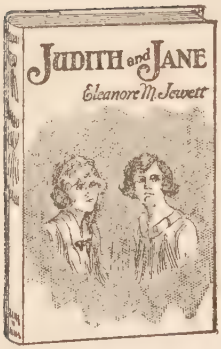

This is the story of two very different girls who became friends. They began by being anything but friendly and Jane who was "new" found life in school rather unpleasant. Then came the play and the mystery of the flowers and things cleared up a bit, only to grow darker with the affair of Alys' book. Strange that Judy, who apparently had so much to make her happy, should be envious of Jane, who had so little! Judy, however, was not so happy as might have been expected. As for Jane, troubles came her way thick and fast, and with the accident as a dreadful climax to the misunderstanding in school, it seemed as if there was nothing left for her to cling to. But Jane found that trouble, met by a brave heart, wins friends, and friends mean more than anything else.

All sorts of wonderful things happened after Judith and Jane became friends. And then the thrilling adventure that might have ended so tragically! It was a friend again who saved the day; a stranger, a borrowed nickel and—but that would be telling the tale.

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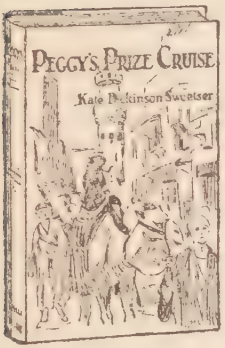
PEGGY'S PRIZE CRUISE

By Kate Dickinson Sweetzer

Author of "Mickey of the Alley," "Ten Boys from Dickens," "Ten Girls from Dickens," etc., etc.



The Orrville News offered as a prize a Mediterranean trip to the student in the senior class of the Orrville High School who would write a synopsis of a play, with a historical theme, best suited for a five reel screen play. Paul Day wins the prize and his play has a try-out with an all-star amateur cast, and Peggy Emmons is chosen to play the lead.

Great preparations are made for the cruise and at last the day of sailing arrives. Then ensue some exciting experiences for Peggy and Paul, for Peggy's family had also decided to take the trip, to Peggy's great joy. The cruisers visit Madeira, Algiers, Constantinople, Cairo, Monte Carlo, etc. A good lively plot runs throughout the book, the travel information being always linked up with the action of the story.

There is a certain appealing heart interest in the book, for as you read you realize that the sights have all been seen by a real person. The author actually made the cruise, and so the story is authoritative in every detail. Miss Sweetser's reputation as a writer of boys' and girls' books not only assures a worth-while story but the human touch which adds great value to her work.

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